
Chapter 3

The European Dimension of the Czech Foreign Policy

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In 2015, the Government coalition of Česká strana sociálně-demokratická (ČSDD), Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová (KDU-ČSL) and the movement ANO 2011 continued to work. The mere fact that this coalition continued to work for a third year without any significant inter-coalition conflicts in the European policy, as was the case with the previous governments, is worthy of attention. The opposition to the Government's European policy was relatively weak in 2015. The coalition government declared a "pro-European" course of its foreign policy, so the pro-European opposition (TOP 09) had only a small space for criticising the Government for the pro-European positions. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the traditional Eurosceptic opposition (ODS) was considerably weakened after the last parliamentary elections. In regard to specific issues, such as the reaction to the refugee crisis and the scandal of "the refugee quotas", the Government had a critical attitude towards the EU, thereby reducing the space for criticism from the traditional eurosceptic political parties. The new populist movement Úsvit of Tomio Okamura is undergoing an internal crisis and is falling apart. The parliamentary opposition had some problems in formulating credible alternative European policies. There is an evident tension between President, Miloš Zeman, and Prime Minister, Bohuslav Sobotka, that is manifested on the level of personal as well as political priorities, but the President's attitudes in the European policy did not pose a major threat and challenge to the Czech European policy. The President had a much stronger opinion on the Union proposal on the solution of the refugee crisis than the Government. He shaped the public debate on this topic and tried to direct the Government's policy, but it was not a threat to the European policy of the Government as such.

The trust of the Czech public in the European Union was on the historically lowest level and, according to most surveys, the distrust even deepened. According to the agency STEM, in March 2015 only 38% of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic trusted in the European Union,¹ and according to the Eurobarometer 43% of the Czech respondents trusted in the European Union.² According to *Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění*, however, the credibility of the European Union actually increased.³

But in the second half of the year 2015, the surveys showed a further rapid decrease of the trust of the Czech public, and this can be connected with the deepening refugee crisis and the escalation of the relations between the Czech Republic (or the Visegrad Group) and the rest of the EU. According to the Eurobarometer, the trust of the citizens of the Czech Republic fell to the level of 27%. In the Czech Republic, the negative assessment of the EU dominates, and our country has been one of the most Eurosceptic members of the Union, together with Great Britain and Greece, affected by the crisis.⁴ The survey also shows that the anti-European attitudes are characteristic of the left-leaning citizens (mainly the voters of KSČM but also ČSSD).⁵ Like in the previous years, we can conclude that the Euroscepticism of the ČSSD voters ties the hands of the officially pro-European Government led by ČSSD. As to the particular Union policies, in accordance with the development in the previous years, there is the fact that the vast majority of the citizens of the Czech Republic (69%) did not agree with the adoption of Euro in the Czech Republic.⁶ But the news is the decreasing support for the free movement of persons within the Schengen area. The Czech political representation across the political spectrum considered and still considers the free movement of persons the main benefit of the European integration for the Czech Republic (see the last issues of this publication). This assumption was questioned in 2015 when the survey of the agency STEM showed that because of the refugee crisis, up to 72% of the citizens of the Czech Republic wanted to restore the border controls within the Schengen area due to the refugees. In the same survey, up to 51% of the citizens of the Czech Republic showed their agreement with the relocation of the refugees among the countries of the EU.⁷

In 2015, *The Concept of the Policy of the Czech Republic in the EU* was published – *Koncepce politiky ČR v EU*.⁸ The preparation of this concept was the goal of the coalition Government of ČSSD, ANO, and KDU-ČSL in its programme declaration from February 2014.⁹ The subtitle of the concept, *The Active and Understandable Czech Republic in United Europe – Aktivní a srozumitelná ČR v jednotné Evropě*, suggests the basic ideological assumptions and priorities of the Czech Government in relation to the EU.

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

The Government parties

In 2015, the Czech Republic did not have any elections that would offer the political parties the place to present their ideological and political basis for the European policy. Therefore, in this part of the chapter, we start from the *ad hoc* opinions of the individual politicians or political parties on the current issues of the European policy. ČSSD, the largest Government party, determined the direction of the European policy in the Czech Republic. ČSSD occupied the key positions in the Government related to the foreign and domestic policy: the Prime Minister (Bohuslav Sobotka), the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Lubomír Zaorálek) and the State Secretary for European

Affairs (Tomáš Prouza). But the European policy of ČSSD has not always been uniform and in the period of the culmination of the refugee crisis, its form was, directly or indirectly, also influenced by the Minister of the Interior, Milan Chovanec, who, in connection with the refugee crisis and the Union proposal for its solution (quotas for the distribution of the refugees), had a stronger opinion and did not hesitate to present it to the public.

ČSSD sees the European policy as a search for balance between the enforcement of the sovereign “*national interests*” and the preservation of the “*European unity*”.¹⁰ The actual membership of the Czech Republic in the EU and its active participation in the decision-making processes of the European Union has been understood by ČSSD as a strategic, political decision. With this basis, ČSSD accessed the issue of sanctions against Russia in the reaction to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and also at the beginning of the migration crisis.

The political debate on the European issues in the first half of 2015 is dominated by the Greek debt crisis and the risk of “Grexit” (withdrawal of Greece from the Eurozone), but the refugee crisis and the Union reaction to it gradually got into the forefront. The Social Democrats have been building their long-term programme on “*international solidarity*” and on the values of “*freedom, justice, solidarity, and human rights*”.¹¹ But the reactions of the representatives of ČSSD to the Greek debt crisis and on the migration crisis show that this solidarity has clear limits and that ČSSD understands them conditionally.

During the Greek debt crisis, ČSSD, as well as the rest of the Czech political scene, had taken over the arguments of the European (and German) right wing when it emphasised the necessity to fulfil the commitments by Greece. It insisted that, first of all, Greece was responsible for the solution of the crisis; it “*has to submit the plan of reforms and changes that they want to make*”, otherwise the situation will end with Greece leaving the Eurozone.¹² According to the representatives of ČSSD, Greece cannot complain about the lack of solidarity from the EU, and in ČSSD we can also hear such opinions that “*the withdrawal of Greece would help the Eurozone and this is also a warning for other countries to fulfil their commitments*”.¹³

As for the refugee crisis, ČSSD formally declares its support for the idea of solidarity, but gradually the discussion about securitization and the fear of foreign cultures and religions came to dominate there. “The migration wave” was gradually presented as a security threat that has to be stopped (the Deputy Chairman of the Senate, Zdeněk Škromach, even called the organized migration a form of war).¹⁴ The leaders of ČSSD were calling for a pan-European solution, but, according to ČSSD, it is about “*the ending of the war conflicts in Syria and Libya*”.¹⁵ According to the Prime Minister, the EU, in connection with the migration crisis, should emphasize the security issues more and more, and, according to Sobotka, the Czech Republic should “*help the people in need*” but the security must have “*a priority over the solidarity*”.¹⁶ The unwillingness to accept the refugees is explained by the leader of ČSSD by the fact that “*the majority of the refugees come from areas with completely different cultural and religious traditions*”, and this is perceived by the people as “*something strange, and it causes their concern*”.¹⁷

Regarding the solidarity with the other member countries (quotas for the distribution of refugees), according to the leaders of ČSSD, the Czech Republic is solidary but nobody should force it to be like this.¹⁸ The attitude of ČSSD towards Greece, Italy, and other countries that had to deal with the refugees, was as uncompromising as it was in the case of the debt crisis. Any solidarity is conditioned by strict compliance with “the rules of the Schengen area” by all the countries of the EU, in particular in the form of protection and control of the external borders of the EU. ČSSD also rejects the common asylum policy; the individual member countries must retain the right to decide to whom and in what numbers they will provide assistance in the form of asylum and integration.¹⁹

The movement ANO, through its Chairman, Andrej Babiš, regarded the refugees to be “*the greatest threat for Europe*”.²⁰ The movement ANO that, unlike the Social Democrats, lacks any ideological and political basis or strategic vision, did not have the need to refer to the values of solidarity or human rights. Therefore, the statements of its leaders (i.e. of A. Babiš) easily slipped to populism and “non-orthodox” proposals. According to Babiš, there is a need “*to help the people in danger*”, but the motivation of the refugees is varied and “*the majority of them seek the generous welfare systems in Germany or England*”. We can mention one of the non-orthodox proposals of A. Babiš, the request that NATO should begin to sink the ships of the smugglers in the Mediterranean Sea,²¹ or the idea of the establishment of refugee camps outside the EU, in Turkey and northern Africa – a kind of “*Ellis Island for 13 million refugees*”.²² A. Babiš was one of the biggest supporters of “*the immediate closure*” of the external borders of the Schengen area, including the isolation of “*the lonely Greece*”.²³ Similarly to other politicians, the rhetoric of A. Babiš escalated after the attacks in Paris that he connected with the migration wave. According to him, the European politicians should “*mainly think of their own people, their own citizens, and not of the humanitarian assistance.*” The strong anti-immigration attitude of A. Babiš goes so far that it denies the refugees to have the right to asylum – in his opinion, it is necessary to close the Schengen border, to have border guards, and “*to give money to Turkey to prevent the illegally escaping people to Europe to board those rubber boats*”.²⁴ But we have to note that the anti-immigration rhetoric is not always shared among the other members of the movement ANO. For example, in July Pavel Tehlička promoted the opinion that the Czech Republic is able to integrate the strangers into the society, and, despite the fact that he thinks the quotas are not effective, he also thinks that we need the refugees.²⁵ As in the example of A. Babiš, at the beginning of the year the Czech politicians call for the differentiation between the economic migrants and refugees, but at the end of the year their rhetoric is stronger and any humanitarian values and norms were drawn back by the arguments showing the refugees as a security threat.

In relation to the EU and its policies, the attitude of ANO is very selective. On the one hand, the Chairman of ANO was among the strongest supporters of the centralized European border guards that should have the competence to protect the borders of the EU (the protection of the borders had been the exclusive competence of the individual member states so far).²⁶ According to ANO, the closure of the borders is the

only way how to prevent the collapse of the Schengen area.²⁷ On the other hand, ANO insists that each country should have its own immigration policy, the EU “*should not determine the immigration policy of the Czech Republic*”.²⁸

In the economic issues, the movement ANO has a liberal position. In its view, Greece should have never been accepted into the Eurozone and in the period of the culminating crisis over the Greek debt to the countries of the Eurozone, Babiš defended the argument that Greece should have gone bankrupt “*to clean the space*”. In his opinion, Greece will never be able to pay its debts.²⁹ The economic topic, in which Babiš has profiled himself in the European policy since the second half of 2014, was the reverse charge and the fight against tax evasions in VAT collection. Initially, Deputy Prime Minister A. Babiš proposed the introduction of the reverse charge for VAT within the entire European Union.³⁰ In 2015, when the obstruction of this proposal showed up, he suggested that the European countries should independently determine which goods and services should be the subject of the reverse charge.³¹

The Christian Democrats perceive Europe as “*a space of shared values*”. While in other political parties the political and ideological debate on the European integration was significantly suppressed in favour of the declared “pragmatism”, sometimes very close to populism, the leaders of KDU-ČSL focused on the value and normative aspects of the European integration in the context of the refugee crisis – one of the opportunities for this was the meeting of the party Evropská lidová strana in Prague in December 2015.³² According to its Chairman, Pavel Bělobrádek, the only solution of the refugee crisis is “*the solidarity and return to the original values of the European Union*”.³³ The Chairperson of KDU-ČSL submitted an open letter to his party members, in which he warned against “*the radicalization of society*” and the spread of fear and panic. According to KDU-ČSL, we are bound “*to help, not only by the Geneva Convention and our laws, but also because of the Christian solidarity and humanity in general*”. In the migration crisis, it is necessary to seek for “*the common solution within the EU*”.³⁴ KDU-ČSL used its pro-European rhetoric, but in the practical issues of the Union policy it shared the policy of the Government: it rejected the mandatory quotas and, as the other governmental parties, preferred “*the solution of the immigration outside the EU, if possible*”, especially the increased assistance for the refugee camps in the regions of fights.³⁵ The leaders of KDU-ČSL argue that Christianity, and not Islam, is part of the European identity.³⁶ The negative attitude to the acceptance of the refugees and lack of solidarity was strongly disapproved of by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cyril Svoboda.³⁷

The opposition parties

In 2015, the attitudes of the party Občanská demokratická strana to the European Union were critical, but its Euroscepticism did not reach the intensity of other opposition parties and in some aspects, it did not differ a lot from the Eurosceptic attitudes of some Government representatives. ODS focused on the criticism of the inability of the European Union to solve the recurring crises. In accordance with its long-term ideological positions, ODS claims that “*a number of problems we had to face in the past were caused by excessive political integration*”. According to ODS, no political

nation has been created, the common European identity does not exist, and, therefore, “*there are no conditions for the excessive degree of solidarity between individual countries*”.³⁸ According to Chairman of ODS, Petr Fiala, Europe is at war that had been announced by the radical Islam, and the EU is not able to ensure our safety.³⁹

ODS quite loudly called for the rejection of the Union quotas for the distribution of refugees when the European Union, against the will of the Czech Republic and some other member countries, approved them.⁴⁰ ODS thinks the migration policy is “*the fundamental issue of the state sovereignty*” and it refuses the principle of voting by the qualified majority. The Civic Democrats even began an initiative called “NO to quotas”, the aim of which was to generate pressure on the Government so that it would not submit itself to the decisions of the Council of the EU in relation to the quotas.⁴¹ The initiative “NO to quotas” is the continuation of the public petition tactics that ODS had used already in 2013 when it had initiated the petition requesting a referendum on the adoption of Euro in the Czech Republic. This petition for the referendum on the adoption of Euro in the Czech Republic was rejected by the Senate in February 2015.⁴²

In December 2015, the former President of the Czech Republic and former Chairman of ODS, Václav Klaus, called for the establishment of a broad platform against the migrants, bringing together different political entities, from ODS to the Communists. Klaus, the leader of this platform, did not invite Blok proti islámu or the movement Svoboda a přímá demokracie of T. Okamura. His effort to create a broader coalition with KSČM reflects the long-term convergence of the foreign-policy positions of V. Klaus and KSČM – with the rigorous Euroscepticism, the criticism of the West, the foreign policy of the USA as well as the European superpowers (especially Germany), and the pro-Russian attitudes in the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian war. As expected, the former President exactly delimited himself against the European Union, which, with its “*total de-democratization and post-democratization is not able to cope, and hypothetically will not be able to cope with*” the migration crisis, as well as against German Chancellor Angela Merkel who, according to Klaus, “*asked the migrants to march on Europe*”.⁴³

The party Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy belongs to the Eurosceptic parties – among the traditional parties, its voters have the strongest anti-Union attitudes (only 16% of the voters of KSČM are satisfied with the membership in the EU).⁴⁴ This corresponds also to the attitudes towards the European integration – the Communists present themselves as a Eurosceptic party fighting against “*the dictate of Brussels*”. According to KSČM, the cause of the refugee crisis in Europe is “*the imperial policy of the superpowers, especially of the USA and NATO*”.⁴⁵ According to the official statements, KSČM “*refuses the spread of hatred towards people of other races, nations or religions*”, but the refugees should be protected “*already before the EU border*”. As expected, the attitude of the Communists to the quotas is fundamentally negative, defining itself in relation to “*the directive decisions of the European Commission on the refugee quotas*”.⁴⁶ KSČM also refused the acceptance of the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine.⁴⁷

In 2015, the strongly Eurosceptic movement *Úsvit přímé demokracie* fell apart. The founder, T. Okamura, left the movement and established a new movement called *Svoboda a přímá demokrace*.⁴⁸ The existing party was renamed *Úsvit – Národní Koalice*. Both parties can be described as strongly anti-European. Okamura's movement *Svoboda a přímá demokracie* even demands a referendum on the exit of the Czech Republic from the European Union.⁴⁹ Okamura also established an alliance with the French eurosceptic party National Front, led by Marine Le Pen who even attended the eurosceptic conference "European peace and prosperity after the European Union".⁵⁰

Development in the perception of the EU

In 2015, we witnessed significant politicization of the debate about the European Union in relation to how the EU began to be associated with new issues, politicians, and events. Since the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and during most of the period from the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU, the EU has been associated with economic issues, whether it was the economic liberalization and the internal market, the European funds, Euro and lately the economic, financial, and debt crises. The security, strategic, and geopolitical perception of the EU has gradually become more and more important in connection with the ongoing enlargement of the EU that culminated in the period of the Russian aggression towards Ukraine when the EU unprecedentedly decided to adopt sanctions against Russia. In 2015, the debate about the EU got new dimensions in connection with the refugee crisis. Not only that there is the securitization of the issue of refugees but the entire European Union is being discussed in connection with those topics that are entirely related to the nature of the Czech society: multiculturalism versus nativism, tolerance versus xenophobia.

In the past, the main dividing lines in the debate about the EU were in the institutional issues (supporters of the supranational and those of the inter-governmental model of integration), the economic issues (supporters of neo-liberalism versus supporters of solidarity and larger redistribution) and the security issues (supporters of the transatlantic ties versus supporters of the strengthening of the common Union foreign and security policy). This topic had been crucial for a long period of time and it determined who was perceived as a "pro-European" or a "Eurosceptic" politician. In general, those politicians and political parties that supported the inter-governmental model of integration were perceived as part of the "Eurosceptic" or "Eurorealistic" political spectrum; their economic policy was based on neo-liberalism and they supported the transatlantic ties at the expense of sovereign foreign policy and security capacities of the European Union.

These dividing lines underwent a few significant changes in the last years and, in connection with the refugee crisis, a new dividing line was added. The dividing line between the supporters of the supranational versus inter-governmental model of integration receded into the background when the debates, accompanying the negotiations and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, calmed down and when the economic and financial crisis broke out. In 2015, we did not have a political debate about the institutional issues of the European integration. Perhaps it was because the traditional di-

vision into the supranational and inter-governmental model of integration, to some extent, lost its sense in the situation in which there was a significant deepening of the integration of the EU through inter-governmental institutions and instruments (inter-governmental agreements outside the primary law).

The actual economic and financial crisis led to a double shift in the perception of the EU and its emerging economic policies. The Union measures to solve the financial and economic crises, promoted by Germany, the Netherlands and other countries where the right-wing liberal and conservative parties dominate, in principle, corresponded to the neo-liberal model of the economy. This is a fundamental change compared to 2011 when the Union strategy Europe 2020 was discussed, which was criticized by the Czech right wing for being too left-wing in the situation in which the EU had to focus on the liberalization of the internal market (movement of goods, services, capital, and workforce).⁵¹

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

The Greek debt crisis

The European agenda in the first half of 2015 was dominated by the Greek debt crisis that culminated in consequence of the ongoing economic crisis in Greece and the election of the extremely left-wing government. Greece was not able to pay its huge debt (approximately 180% of GDP in 2015) to its international creditors and after the election of the government of Syriza and Independent Greeks, the will to pay the debt and to continue in the austerity measures required by the so-called Troika significantly decreased, and that led to the escalation of the relations between Greece and its creditors from the other countries of the Eurozone. In the conflict between Greece, which required reduction of its debt and alleviation of the austerity measures, and the creditors (led by Germany), that required the continuation of the reforms and austerity measures as a condition for the third rescue package, the Czech Republic, as a country not using the Euro, was only an external observer. But at the same time, the Czech Republic clearly inclined to Germany and other countries of the so-called northern wing of the Eurozone (Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, the Baltic countries, and others) that had an uncompromising attitude towards Greece, under the threat of the forced exit from the Eurozone. As mentioned in the part about the ideological starting points, the Government led by the Social Democrats, in principle, was still in the position of a right-wing government of Prime Minister Petr Nečas (ODS) in its attitude towards the solution of the Eurozone crisis, particularly the Greek debt crisis, and it supported the policy of austerity measures promoted by the creditor countries led by Germany.

The Czech Republic, as a country not using the Euro, did not participate in the third rescue package for Greece that had been approved by the Eurozone countries in July 2015. Given the fact that this rescue package was approved under time pressure, the EU decided to use short-term bridge financing from the European Financial and Stability Mechanism (EFSM), which was, in fact, a pan-European instrument. The

Czech Republic rejected the financial loan from the EFSM,⁵² and it agreed with it only after the EU had guaranteed that if Greece did not pay back the financial assistance from the EFSM, the member countries outside the Eurozone would get compensation.

In June and July, when the crisis culminated, the Government refused the possibility of writing off the Greek debt that Greece had towards the other member countries of the Eurozone in consequence of the first and second rescue packages from 2010 and 2012. According to the Prime Minister, *it was absolutely understandable that the European countries insisted on the continuation of the reforms*, the organization of the social programmes for the most vulnerable Greek groups could not be done by writing off the Greek debt. For the Prime Minister, this situation “was largely unacceptable”.⁵³ The Government joined the coercion of the other member countries of the EU on Greece, according to the Prime Minister the next Greek request for a loan would be not successful and the exit (involuntary) of Greece from the Eurozone was “a realistic option”.⁵⁴ The exit of Greece from the Eurozone would not threaten the Czech Republic.⁵⁵

According to the Deputy Prime Minister, A. Babiš, Greece should have never entered into the Eurozone (see above). The strongest statements of the Czech Government officials were calmed down only by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, according to whom the collapse of Greece might have threatened the Eurozone, and the Czech Republic was dependent on its stability.⁵⁶ The anti-Greek rhetoric of the Czech official representatives culminated in December 2015 when, in the response to the statements of President M. Zeman, Greece briefly withdrew its ambassador to Prague.⁵⁷ The Government downplayed this quarrel, but in fact this was the most serious crisis in the mutual relations since the establishment of the Czech Republic.

The strategic interest of the Czech Republic and its attitude towards the Eurozone

In the Concept, the Government repeatedly emphasized that the membership of the Czech Republic in the EU was understood as “*a political project, as a strategic option and as the main economic, social, cultural, and security framework of the development and ideology of the Czech Republic*”.⁵⁸ In this view, the Government explicitly delimited itself towards the previous centre-right governments as well as the former Eurosceptic President, V. Klaus, that had always perceived the membership of the Czech Republic in the EU through economic revenues and costs. On a more general level, the Government specified two strategic interests, forming the basis for the specific goals and principles.

The first strategic interest of the Czech Republic is to be “*a full-value member of the EU*”. And this interest can be achieved “*only by the entry into the Eurozone*”. But the adoption of the Euro is not among the goals of the Czech policy in the EU. In accordance with the rhetoric programme of the Government, the priority of the Government is only “the preparation for the entry into the Eurozone”, and its basis should be “*the thorough public debate on the consequences of the membership in the Eurozone*”.⁵⁹ At the end of its mandate, the Government does not want to decide on the participation of the Czech Republic in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism

II (ERM II) and on the date of the entry of the Czech Republic into the Eurozone; its ambition is limited to *“the opening of the space”* for such a decision.

The second strategic interest is *“the united European Union”*, which means *“the sustainment of the unity of the European Union despite all separative tendencies”*. But, in the very next sentence, the Government adds that *“they understand the need for further integration of the Eurozone”*, and they admit that the differentiated integration may threaten our position in the European Union.

But when we compare the last centre-right Government of Prime Minister Nečas, the ideological basis of the Government of Prime Minister Sobotka has changed and the Government recognizes the strategic meaning of the full-value membership and the united European Union; the strategic documents, such as the Concept, show the limited possibilities for achieving the strategic interests. The achievement of the strategic objective – the full-value membership in the EU (i.e. the adoption of the Euro) is prevented by the public opposition to the Euro and also by the deepening mistrust in the EU as such (see the introduction of this chapter). The Government is aware of this problem, it proposes a solution in the form of another *“information strategy”* that should *“better inform the citizens about the functioning of the EU, the roles of the Czech Republic, and the advantages of our membership”*, and the improvement of the news reporting in the public media as well as an intense debate about the direction of the EU within the National Convention.⁶⁰

Similarly to the previous governments, the Government of Prime Minister Sobotka, in its Concept, was not able to cope with the reality of the deepening integration of the Eurozone. The differentiated degree of integration, whether it is the consequence of the centripetal tendencies of the core or the separative tendencies of the periphery, threatens the unity of the EU and the achievement of the full-value membership of the Czech Republic in the EU. Even if the deepening integration of the Eurozone without our participation, which is disabled by the above-mentioned rejection of the public, weakens the position of the Czech Republic in the EU, the Czech Republic does not have any instruments to prevent this trend. Like the Government of Nečas, also the Government of Sobotka finally ended up in the position when it was not willing to engage in the deepening integration of the Eurozone (to adopt the Euro), and at the same time, because of economic reasons, it recognizes the need for further integration of the Eurozone in order to improve its functioning and the internal convergence.

The refugee crisis

The agenda of the European policy that attracted the most attention in 2015, was, undoubtedly, the issue of the quotas for the redistribution of refugees. In May 2015, the European Commission introduced the European Programme for Migration⁶¹, which presented the framework programme for the following measures on the European level. Two *“implementation packages”* followed. The first one, of 27th May, contained the proposal of the exceptional relocation of 40,000 people who needed international protection, from Italy and Greece to other member countries, the recommendation for the *“re-settlement”* of 20,000 applicants, the action plan against the smuggling

of immigrants, and other measures. According to this proposal, the Czech Republic would get 1,853 refugees.⁶² The second implementation package of the Commission was introduced on 9th September and it contained the proposal for the exceptional relocation of 120,000 people who expressly needed international protection, and also the mechanism of the permanent relocation for all member countries, and some other measures, such as the list of safe countries of origin, the more effective return policy, and the trust fund for Africa.⁶³

From the very beginning, the Czech Republic rejected the quotas and it initially emphasized that “*the quotas are not a solution*”.⁶⁴ The first package was finally accepted in a modified form, preserving the principle of voluntarism, under the pressure of the Czech Republic and other countries refusing the mandatory quotas.⁶⁵ But the second implementation package was accepted in September 2015 with the mandatory quotas, despite the rejection of the Czech Republic.⁶⁶

The criticism of the mechanism for the redistribution of refugees was, especially in the first half of the year, a tactical step, to some extent, and the Government used it to try to force the other member countries to address the given issue that the Czech Republic considered to be a priority, i.e. a better protection of the external borders of the EU. The Government defended its negative attitude to the redistribution of refugees from Greece and Italy, using the reasoning that the refugees should be given help in the place of the conflict. According to the Prime Minister, also a legal framework under which the quotas could be implemented is missing there and, in his opinion, the acceptance of the quotas for the redistribution of the refugees from Greece and Italy would “*encourage the migration pressure*”.⁶⁷ And, last but not least, the Government claimed that it was not possible to hold them back and to deny their right to free movement in the Schengen area.⁶⁸ The refugees do not want to stay in the Czech Republic and those allocated to the Czech Republic will continue to Germany. The Government repeatedly claimed that it was prepared for the acceptance of hundreds or even thousands of refugees, but it refused the delegation of competences on the EU and insisted on the principle of voluntarism.⁶⁹ So the Czech Republic officially did not protest against the very acceptance of the refugees in the Czech Republic, but against the fact that the European Union should decide about the allocation of the refugees, against “*the completely new attitude that is revolutionary to some extent*”. The Government criticized the Commission that they had come with the proposal for the mandatory relocation of refugees from their own initiative in the situation when the European Council agreed the voluntary quotas. According to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zaorálek, the member countries must have the decisions under their own control, the decision whom to accept into their territory.⁷⁰ The refugee crisis clearly showed the line that the official pro-European Government that declared the ambition “*to fundamentally change the Czech attitude and behaviour of the EU*”,⁷¹ only a year ago, does not want to cross. The Czech Republic rejected the deepening of the integration towards the common asylum and migration policy and it emphasized the individual responsibility of the member countries within the inter-governmental model of the common asylum system.

On the formal level, the negative attitude of the Czech Government to the mandatory quotas for the distribution of refugees and to the deepening of the Union asylum and migration policy was formulated within the framework position of the Czech Republic for the plan of the Commission in the fight against illegal immigration into the EU from May 2015, and in the strategy called *Strategie migrační politiky České republiky* that had been prepared by the Ministry of the Interior and that was approved by the Government in May 2015.⁷² The Ministry of the Interior prepared a detailed analysis of the Union proposal on the relocation.⁷³

On the very first page of the document, we can read the reasoning, popular among the Czech opponents of the adoption of the Euro,⁷⁴ that the refugee wave presents “*a significant change of circumstances in which the primary law of the European Union had been negotiated*”. The authors of the analysis refer to the clause *rebus sic stantibus* in the international law and they say that there is no legal basis for the voting by the qualified majority. The proposal of the relocation quotas is criticized because it violates “*the principle of the sovereign equality of the countries*” and their “*political independence*”. In the document of the Government, we can see considerable scepticism about the possibility to regulate secondary migration (i.e. the migration from one member country to another). Not only that the Government has no solution to the problem of the secondary migration and the so-called *asylum shopping*, but it also implicitly criticizes the European Commission that, in its proposal, does not take into account “*the individual will and preferences of the relocated persons*” with regard to their final destination. The document does not address the fact of how the relocation allows the rightful refugees to fulfil their right to asylum and protection, but it quite extensively explains how the relocation threatens their human dignity and degrades them into “*the position of mere objects – addressees of the administrative decisions*”.⁷⁵

On the contrary, the Czech Republic supported the creation of the common list of safe countries of origin, and quite strongly promoted the idea of establishing the so-called hot spots, i.e. the registration and detention centres in the peripheral countries of the Schengen area where the initial phase of the asylum procedure would be completed and that would serve as “filters” for people to be relocated or to be returned.⁷⁶

The key moment of the agenda of the refugee crisis was the above-mentioned September adoption of the second implementation package that included also the quotas for the relocation of the refugees. According to the Prime Minister, the Czech Republic tried to enforce the consensual decision on the level of the European Council, but it was not possible to avoid the majority voting in the Council. The Czech Republic was prepared to vote against the quotas, even though it was clear that it was not possible to set the blocking minority without Poland and that it would be outvoted.⁷⁷ After the adoption of the second implementation package in September 2015 that included also the mandatory quotas for the relocation of the refugees, the Government repeated its disagreement with this decision but, at the same time, rejected to join the planned complaint of Slovakia for the one-time redistribution of refugees into the Union countries with the reasoning that it did not want to get the Czech Republic into isolation.⁷⁸

Protection of the external borders and the refusal of the mini-Schengen

In 2015, the Czech Republic presented itself as a resolute supporter of the “*free movement of persons in the European Union while promoting the measures against its abuse*”⁷⁹, and together with the other countries of the Visegrad Group it created the group of the “*Friends of Schengen*” with the aim of supporting the idea of free movement as the major achievement of the European integration of the post-Communist countries⁸⁰ and fighting against the attempts to create the so-called mini-Schengen. The Government also defended the *status quo* in the question of the preservation of the so-called Dublin System⁸¹ – the Union rules that determine which country should deal with the request of a foreigner for asylum. According to the basic principle, the request for asylum shall be assessed by the country of the EU, to the territory of which the migrant came for the first time. According to the European Commission, the Dublin System does not function⁸²; according to the southern countries it unfairly burdens the countries of the first entry and, on the contrary, the Czech Republic, as an inland country without any external land border of the Schengen area, regard the Dublin System as a favourable one and defends it. At the moment when Germany started to think about the return to the Dublin rules, the Czech Government turned around and claimed that the return to the Dublin System for the acceptance of migrants would be “*problematical*”.⁸³

An important part of the Czech policy towards the EU was the protection of the external borders of the Schengen area. The strengthening of the role of the EU in the protection of the external borders of the Schengen area was presented by the Czech Republic as an alternative to the relocation mechanism and, at the same time, as an act of solidarity with the southern countries most affected by the migration crisis. At the beginning, the Czech republic said that every country was responsible for its part of the external border, but in the second half the Czech position changed and the Government accepted the idea of the European border and coast guard that would help the peripheral countries to protect the external borders.⁸⁴ Unlike the other countries of V4 (Poland and Hungary), that have an external border of the Schengen area, the Czech Republic supported the use of the European border and coast guard even without the agreement of the given country.⁸⁵

The Czech support for the strengthening of the competences of the EU on the protection of the external borders of the EU or of the Schengen area is in a strong contrast with the opposition to the deepening of the integration toward the real common European asylum policy (not only the mere coordination of the national asylum policies). As an example, the Minister of the Interior, who is profiled as a strong opponent of the deepening of the Union asylum policy, publicly supported the idea of “*the international police force or international customs force*” that should “*protect the Schengen area*”. In his opinion, this kind of a project should be initiated by the European Commission on the basis of the pan-European demand and the Czech Republic would be prepared to help with “*hundreds of people*”.⁸⁶

The reverse charge

The issue of the reverse charge did not get into the public and media space like the migration crisis did, but we think it is important to mention it. Even in 2014, Deputy Prime Minister Andrej Babiš came with the proposal to introduce the institute of the *reverse charge* for VAT on the level of the EU with the reasoning that such a measure would prevent tax frauds from the EU.⁸⁷ A. Babiš considers the fight against the tax evasion to be a priority for the Czech Republic in the EU – but the support of the Prime Minister and the other members of the Government was indifferent and the entire proposal is perceived rather as a private initiative of the Ministry of Finance.

The proposal to introduce the reverse charge was repeatedly rejected by the European Commission. In 2014, the European Commission rejected the proposal of A. Babiš to introduce the pan-European reverse charge, and Babiš responded with the request that the individual countries and not the EU should decide about the introduction of the reverse charge for VAT.⁸⁸ Deputy Prime Minister, A. Babiš, promoted the reverse charge, but now in terms of the competencies of the member countries to introduce the reverse charge without the need to ask the European Commission for an exemption, also in 2015.⁸⁹ His proposal was that the countries themselves should determine what goods and services would be the subject of the reverse charge, but the European Commission rejected this in October 2015.⁹⁰

EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: IDENTIFYING AND CHARACTERIZING THE KEY ACTORS

The Government of the Czech Republic

As mentioned above, also in 2015, all government posts, important for the formulation and coordination of the European policy of the Czech Republic, were held by the largest coalition party ČSSD: Prime Minister, B. Sobotka, State Secretary for European Affairs, T. Prouza, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, L. Zaorálek. It would seem that, contrary to the previous governments, the European policy is not the subject of the intergovernmental conflicts. On the general level, this assumption is valid in fact, but in the particular policies there were sometimes different priorities and positions of the individual members of the Government. As the Prime Minister himself warned in his speech in front of the leaders of diplomatic offices in the Czech Republic abroad, *“the foreign and domestic policies are more interconnected than ever before”*.⁹¹

In practice this means that the individual departmental ministers were increasingly engaged in the formulation of the European policy of the Czech Republic. The most distinctive input in these terms was the opinion of the Ministry of the Interior in the issue of the refugee crisis that had hit Europe, in particular, its position in the issue of quotas for the redistribution of refugees within the EU. This entry caused some displeasure among the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the Government Office of the Czech Republic that had concerns that the main topic of the European agenda would be possessed by the medially capable Minister of the Interior. Minister M. Chovanec strongly opposed the plans of the EU

to introduce mandatory quotas for the redistribution of refugees. At the same time, he was also quite reserved to the acceptance of the refugees within voluntary quotas. He thinks that the asylum policy in the Czech Republic only prolongs the journey of the migrants into the desired country, which is Germany, in his opinion.⁹² In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior published the strategy of the migration policy, *Strategie migrační politiky České republiky*.⁹³

The peak of the tension between the Minister of the Interior and the other members of the Government was probably the open media battle between Milan Chovanec and the Minister of Legislation and Human Rights, Jiří Dienstbier, who, in September 2015, proposed the acceptance of fifteen thousand refugees.⁹⁴ A group of his governmental colleagues, including the Chairman of ANO, A. Babiš, and the Chairman of KDU-ČSL, P. Bělobrádek, criticized Dienstbier's proposal. The Minister of the Interior, Chovanec, even threatened to leave the Government if it changed its previous refusal of the quotas.⁹⁵ Also the Deputy Prime Minister, Babiš, caused a certain disarray when he proposed to reconsider the previous attitude of the Government and the joining of the Czech Republic to the lawsuit of Hungary and the Slovak Republic against the quotas for the redistribution of refugees.⁹⁶

Another example of the penetration of the peculiar departmental agenda into the European policy was the reverse charge with VAT of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, A. Babiš. In the foreign policy, this was a non-conflicting issue.

The President

In 2015, President Miloš Zeman acted as the loudest and most influential critic of the Union policy in the issues of asylum and migration. He unequivocally refused the European quotas (mandatory or voluntary) for the redistribution of refugees among the individual member states of the EU.⁹⁷ He was against the acceptance of any refugees who were Muslims and he called them “*to be unable to assimilate*” and he regards them to be a threat (the potential “*jihadists*”).⁹⁸ He suggested to join the lawsuit of the Slovak Republic and Hungary against the introduction of mandatory quotas, but the Government refused this.

In accordance with the official policy of the Government, the President criticized the European Union because “*it had shown zero ability to secure its external boundaries*”.⁹⁹ M. Zeman required the strengthening of the external borders of the EU. At the beginning of the year, he opposed the possibility of introducing the border controls¹⁰⁰, but in the course of the year, his rhetoric changed in favour of the renewal of the border controls in connection with the refugee crisis. He required protecting the Czech border by the joined patrols of the police and army.¹⁰¹ If the European Union continued in the acceptance of immigrants of a different ethnic origin, religion, social, and economic environment, it would be logical, according to him, “*that the individual member countries would start with fortification*”. He did not rule out the possibility to restore the border controls or the creation of a smaller Schengen area.¹⁰²

The Czech President continued to present himself as a Eurofederalist and he regarded his Eurofederalism to be “*a defensive reflex against the outer pressure*”. Previously, he thought the main threat was the Russian imperialism, but today he thinks

the main threats to Europe are the radical Islamist organizations trying to create one Islamic state, the caliphate.¹⁰³ But his attitude towards the Union policies was Eurosceptic. On the domestic political scene, M. Zeman supported the entities (Úsvit přímé demokracie, Islám v Česku nechceme) which shared his fear of Islam, but they surely do not share Zeman's Eurofeudalistic "*defensive reflex*". By contrast, these entities belong to the greatest opponents of the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance on the Czech political scene (see above) and, under the influence of Zeman's criticism of the Union policies, they think that the European Union (much less the European federation) is the cause and not the solution to the crisis. President Zeman, putting himself in the role of the person who "*brings provocative themes*" and who "*disturbs*" and "*at the same time, defends the national interests of the Czech Republic*", rather contributed to the strengthening of the Eurosceptic mood in the Czech society.

M. Zeman also criticized the Union sanctions against Russia because of the conflict in Ukraine that he, in accordance with the official Russian position, described as "*a civil war*". According to the President, they could be removed until the end of the year 2015, and at the same time, according to the President, Russia will become the member of the European Union in twenty years.¹⁰⁴ On the contrary, he refused the possibility that Turkey might become a member of the European Union.¹⁰⁵ The President was also one of the biggest critics of Greece during the Greek debt crisis. Already in February, he said that "*Greece itself should leave the Eurozone, or it should be pushed out from it*".¹⁰⁶ In July, when there was a threat that it might be pushed out, he said that the Czech Republic should continually try to adopt the Euro, but only after Greece has left the Eurozone. He repeated his statements also in December when he talked about his disappointment that Greece had remained in the Eurozone, and Greece responded to this with the temporary withdrawal of their ambassador in Prague.¹⁰⁷

The Chamber of Deputies

As in the previous years, the Chairman of the Committee of European Affairs was Ondřej Benešík (KDU-ČSL). In March, the Subcommittee for Migration and Asylum Policy was established, which clearly illustrated the dominance of the asylum issue and migration policy in the European agenda in 2015.

Like the other actors of the European policy of the Czech Republic, the Chamber of Deputies rejected the Union proposal on the introduction of mandatory quotas for the relocation of refugees from Greece and Italy.¹⁰⁸

In September, after the conflicts with KSČM, the Chamber of Deputies approved the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine (the Senate had approved this agreement already in December 2014).¹⁰⁹

The Senate

The position of the Senate toward the European agenda basically followed the above-mentioned governmental positions when it prompted the Government to reject the first as well as the second implementation package for the refugee crisis. It refused "*the one-time as well as permanent relocation mechanisms*" among the EU countries and

demanded the solution of the migration crisis in the places of origin of the refugees.¹¹⁰ But, at the same time, it urged *“the relocation of the most threatened groups of refugees on the basis of the voluntary decision of the Czech Republic”* and *“the creation of all legal and safe migration channels for the refugees coming to Europe”*.¹¹¹

The Senate identified itself with the Government’s goal to sustain the free movement of persons *“with the co-existing balance of freedom on the one hand and security on the other hand”*. But at the same time, in March 2015, it refused the proposals for the creation of the European system of border guards because of the fear of limiting the competences of the member countries in the protection of the external borders.¹¹²

Among others, the Senate dealt with the package of measures on the energy union. It supported the establishment of the energy union. But it reminded that the composition of the energy mix had to be *“the subject to the free decision of each member country”*. It is necessary to significantly strengthen the security of the diversification of resources, suppliers, and transport routes, in particular with respect to gas and crude oil. It repeated its support for nuclear energy and showed caution for the use of renewable resources that should be used so that *“they do not threaten the competitiveness of the European economy”*.¹¹³

In 2015, the intensity of communication between the Senate and the European Commission continued to decrease. The Senate submitted only 22 resolutions to the Commission, for the drafts of the Union legislation (compared to 38 resolutions in 2014 and 64 resolutions in 2013). In 2015, the Senate of the Parliament of Czech Republic accepted only one reasoned opinion, for the proposal of the regulation of the European Parliament and Council establishing an emergency relocation mechanism.¹¹⁴ The Chairman of the Senate’s Committee on European Union Affairs was Václav Hampl.

CONCLUSION

The year 2015 clearly showed the limits of the Czech solidarity, both within the European Union as well as outside of it. In the issue of the Greek debt crisis, the Czech Republic stood on the side of the supporters of a very strong attitude towards Greece, namely Germany (Angela Merkel, Wolfgang Schäuble), the Netherlands (Jeroen Dijsselbloem), and also Slovakia (Róbert Fico, Peter Kažimír). The Czech Republic insisted on the observance of the Greek liabilities, the continuation of the reforms and on austerity measures, despite the fact that, according to many foreign and also Czech economists, they were counter-productive and *“they completely decimate the economic growth”*.¹¹⁵

The culmination of the policy of ostracism of Greece was the statement of President Zeman that the Czech Republic would adopt the Euro *“on the first day after Greece has left the Eurozone”* because otherwise the Czech Republic would have to pay for its debts.¹¹⁶ He also expressed great disappointment over the fact that the tough negotiations between the Eurozone and Greece did not result in the forced withdrawal of Greece from the Eurozone, to which Greece responded with the withdrawal of its

ambassador in Prague.¹¹⁷ It is necessary to mention that the President's undiplomatic statement reflected the long-term nature of the Czech debate about the Greek debt crisis. The collapse of the Greek public finances was used already in 2010 by the Czech right-wing parties (e.g. TOP 09) as a deterrent argument they used to justify their programme of the austerity budget.¹¹⁸ Even the previous President, V. Klaus, had not avoided the diplomatic conflict with Greece; he called the Greeks the drinkers of ouzo that did not belong in the monetary union with Germany, for which he earned a fierce response of the Greek Prime Minister at that time.¹¹⁹ In the conflict about the nature of the economic governance in the Eurozone, the Government of Nečas clearly inclined to the so-called "northern wing" of the Eurozone and supported the effort of Germany on better enforcement of the budgetary rules for the Eurozone.¹²⁰ This policy existed also after the Government, led by ČSSD, came to power which, in the conflict about the nature of the next rescue package for Greece, was on the side of the supporters of a very strong attitude. In July, in response to the Greek referendum against the agreement with the international creditors, Prime Minister Sobotka warned that the withdrawal of Greece from the Eurozone was a real possibility.¹²¹

The limits of the Czech solidarity were fully demonstrated during the refugee crisis, not only against the refugees themselves but also against the other member countries – especially against those that had the bad luck of being located at the beginning of the migration routes into Europe and that were responsible for the hardly controllable and, mainly for the refugees, dangerous sea border. The action of the police and army that should help to build and guard fences *between* the European countries cannot be regarded as the manifestation of the inter-European solidarity. Likewise, the Czech policemen sent to Macedonia to help to patrol the Greek-Macedonian border were definitely not seen as "the manifestation of the Czech solidarity". It was an undisguised pressure on Greece, in an effort to persuade it to accept the help from the EU (the Union personnel on the northern border with Macedonia, foreign border guards on the Greek islands and the help with the accommodation of the migrants).¹²² The rejection of the European quotas for the relocation of the refugees by the countries of the Visegrad Group and their effort to block the Balkan routes were perceived as the effort to transform Greece to one "collection camp" for the refugees. This effort seems to be hypocritical, especially from the Czech Republic that is so afraid of "*the cultural and religious differences*" that it has a problem to accept a few tens of refugees to its territory.

In general, the solidarity of the Czech Republic is limited to the very limited territory of the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans. We do not perceive this problem as an ideological failure and resignation to the declared human dignity and solidarity; it is closely connected with the inability of the Czech Republic to establish strategic partnerships beyond the narrow Central Europe. The year 2015 was highlighted by many as the moment of restoration for the partnership within V4. In fact, this strengthening of cooperation within V4 is a symptom of the restoration of many dividing limits between the old (western) and new (eastern) member countries and the inability of the Czech Republic to establish a coalition beyond the narrowly defined region of Central Europe. So, the alibism and lack of solidarity of the Czech Republic

is not only a moral problem, but it discredits and undermines the negotiation position of the Czech Republic within the entire European Union. We consider the narrative of “*the non-solidary Eastern European countries*” to be particularly dangerous, not only in terms of the impact on the official relations of the member countries (see the unprecedented diplomatic conflict with Greece) but also because we can strengthen the existing latent prejudices of part of the Western-European public against “*Eastern Europe*”, the disillusion from the consequences of the eastern expansion.

It is necessary to appreciate the will of the Czech Republic to build the common European protection of the Union borders (The European Border and Coast Guard) that has been in the responsibility of the individual member countries so far. But at the same time, they think that the Czech attitude is buck-passing. The Czech Republic supported the limitation of the national sovereignty in the area that is not directly related to it – it means in the protection of the external borders of the EU/the Schengen area. It supported the proposal to establish The European Board and Coast Guard which should be located at the external borders, even without the agreement of the related member countries. What might the reaction of the Czech politicians be if the Czech borders were (similarly to Poland or Greece) the land or sea borders of the Schengen area and “Brussels” forced us to accept foreign border guards? The Czech practice (see the police and army training “*to protect the borders against refugees*”)¹²³ and the discussion (see the populist calls of some politicians to close the borders) at the time when the refugee crisis culminates showed that the protection of the borders was perceived, even in the Czech Republic, as one of the key attributes of state sovereignty. While the Czech Republic supported the limitation of the national sovereignty of the countries located on the external border of the Schengen area (placement of the European Border and Coast Guard without their agreement), it rejected the limitation of the national sovereignty of the countries located inside the Schengen area (relocation of the refugees on the basis of mandatory quotas). The Czech Republic insisted that the decision about the acceptance of the refugees must be a sovereign decision of the individual member countries. The combination of fear of refugees and mistrust in the Union institutions and other member countries that should register the refugees was so huge that the Czech Republic insisted that it had to have full control over the refugees coming into the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic rejected the deepening of the integration towards the common asylum policy. According to the Government, the acceptance of the refugees should be the decision of the individual member countries although it was a unilateral decision of the German government about the acceptance of the refugees, which, according to the members of the Czech Government, only accelerated the refugee crisis.

On the most general rhetoric level, a lot of politicians expressed their sympathy with the refugees, referring to the declared moral values, ranging from “*the Christian values*” and “*humanity*” (KDU-ČSL) to “*the solidarity among the poor*” (KSČM). In the particular debates related to the political decisions on the solution of the migration crisis (e.g. using the relocation quotas), the securitization arguments come to the forefront that link the refugees with the terrorist threat, they question the feasibility of the entire mechanism and they move the solution beyond the strengthened exter-

nal border of the Schengen area. Finally, on the lowest level (the analysis of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic), the moral argument completely changes there. According to the experts from the Ministry, the acceptance of the refugees on the basis of relocation quotas would mean the violation of their human dignity and their degradation “*into the positions of mere objects – addressees of the administrative decisions.*” The Czech Republic thus helps the refugees in the best way when it rejects the quotas for their relocation from other member countries.

As I said in the introduction, in the European policy of the Czech Republic in 2015 the Government had a hegemonic position that was given by its parliamentary majority and ability to cover a relatively broad political spectrum, ranging from the pro-European foreign policy to Euroscepticism in the attitude towards the particular Union policies (especially in case of quotas for the relocation of the refugees). The governmental parties justify their critical attitude towards the acceptance of the refugees and the opposition to the Union quotas for the relocation of refugees, with fear of the rise of the populist and anti-migration political parties and movements, such as in Germany. This was more or less successful in 2015, unlike in the neighbouring countries (Poland, Hungary), no anti-migration and well-defined anti-European political party was established on the Czech political scene.

But this policy had its price. Firstly, although the Prime Minister was against some definite anti-immigration attitudes of President Zeman, the Government as a whole kept its dominant position in the internal political debate about European issues, only for the price that, in the particular questions related to the refugee quotas and the migration crisis of the EU, it partially took over the anti-immigration and anti-European rhetoric. The representatives of the Czech Government presented “*the wave of migration*” as a threat for Europe¹²⁴, and they blame Germany because of it because “*it has given priority to the humanitarian aspects of the crisis before the issues of security*”.¹²⁵ The particular refugee quotas were then framed through the traditional Czech Eurosceptic discussion as another example of “*the Brussels dictate*”.¹²⁶ Secondly, the negative attitude of the Czech Republic and other countries of the Visegrad Group led to the mentioned restoration of the dividing line between the Union core and the new member countries, or the “old” and “new” member countries.

The Government fails “*to lead itself to the integration core*”¹²⁷, as it was resolved in its policy statement. The attitude of the Government to the fulfilment of “*the strategic interests*” of the Czech Republic that was declared in the Concept of Policy, *Koncepce politiky ČR a EU*, is a mixture of postponed key decisions and contradictory statements. The fulfilment of the first strategic goal is “*to be a full-value member of the EU that can be achieved only through the entry into the Eurozone*”, but this is limited by the domestic factors - the rejection by the public of the adoption of the Euro. The decision on the adoption of the Euro is always postponed.

The second goal, the “*unified European Union*” which means the preservation of unity of the European Union despite all the “*centrifugal tendencies*” remains unfulfilled, among other reasons, also because of the policy of the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic presents itself as a moderate country that, in favour of the com-

mon unity, does not seek for useless conflicts (see the decision not to join the lawsuit against the refugee quotas) but with the ongoing quarrel with Greece, its rhetoric usually leads to the deepening of the political and psychological dividing lines between the member states of the EU.

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