
Chapter 9

The Countries of the Eastern Partnership in the Czech Foreign Policy

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Eastern policy belongs to the declared long-term priorities of the Czech foreign policy. Although in 2015, especially in its second half, the debate on the European Neighbourhood Policy was dominated by the refugee crisis, there were also several shifts in the Eastern policy. The most important one was the solid anchoring of the Eastern policy as a priority in all the new conceptual documents, while in the foreign-policy concept, Eastern Europe, together with the Western Balkans, are defined as a part of the Euro-Atlantic area. These changes are based on the programme declarations of the Government adopted in 2014, in which it undertook to understand the EU as the basic framework of the Czech foreign policy.¹

The European Neighbourhood Policy was launched in 2004 to support the democratization of the southern and eastern neighbourhood of the Union and their approximation to the EU standards. On the side of the Union, it was a combination of the development and security policies because by supporting the reform programmes in the neighbourhood, it also supported its own strategic interests. The Eastern Partnership, launched in 2009 on the initiative of the Czech Republic, represents the deepening of the offer towards the six post-Soviet countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. During the decade of the existence of the Neighbourhood Policy, there was progress in many areas and greater consistency with the EU was achieved too, but the main objectives have not been fulfilled yet.²

Despite the steps towards deeper institutionalization, the Czech Eastern policy struggled with a number of problems. The most notable ones include: (1) the low rate of identification of a number of elites and the public with the fundamental policy objectives of the European integration, while the right to benefit from the positive results has often accentuated over the obligation to contribute to the solution of the problems; (2) the disproportion between the ambition – the declared objectives in the Eastern policy – and the resources (financial, human resources) allocated for its achievement. The controversial statement of the President of the Czech Republic in relation to the situation in Ukraine and the mismatch between the business priorities and policy objectives of the Government in the Neighbourhood Policy can also be regarded as problematic. This chapter summarizes the main points of the Czech Eastern policy in 2015 and the main attention is paid to Ukraine.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

In comparison with the previous year, Eastern Europe was a far less politicized and polarizing issue. This can be attributed to several factors – the situation in Ukraine was no longer a novelty, in the second half of the year the political agenda was dominated by the refugee crisis, and the Czech Republic had already taken part in several rounds of the debate on the direction of the foreign policy. Like in 2014, the policy of the Czech Republic can be described as more reactive and although the Czech Republic tried to shape the European policy, it did not have higher goals than the continuation of the previously agreed priorities – the continuation of the association process and the visa liberalization. Especially in the second half of the year, the position of the Czech Republic in the European institutions was more complicated due to the hesitant attitude to the sharing of responsibility for the solution of the refugee crisis.

In 2015, the Government approved several conceptual documents that firmly anchored Eastern Europe in the Czech foreign policy.³ The security strategy, *Bezpečnostní strategie ČR*, approved in February, considers the membership in NATO and the EU to be the starting point of the Czech security policy; it is based on the principle of indivisibility of security: “Regarding the nature of the security environment, the defence and protection of the citizens in the territory of the country does not end at the borders of the Czech Republic.”⁴ The Eastern Partnership, including the policy of the expansion of the EU and NATO, is presented as one of the priority instruments of the security policy in the European space.⁵

In April 2015, the Government adopted the concept of the Czech EU policy, *Koncepce politiky ČR v EU*, which sets out four goals: peace and security; economic development; justice and solidarity, and the firm anchoring of the Czech Republic in the EU.⁶ In the Concept, the active performance in the policy of the Eastern Partnership concept is mentioned as a part of peace and security – the Czech Republic wishes to strengthen the common security and defence policies of the EU, to stabilize the Neighbourhood and to continue in the expansion of the Union. The emphasis on the choice of the selection of the neighbours is very important: “The Government will actively shape the policy of the Eastern Partnership. It will support the deeper differentiation of this policy to better reflect the expectations of the particular partner countries as well as to ensure their free choice of their ties to the EU.”⁷

The concept also emphasizes the social dimension of the foreign policy: “In the context of liberalization of the world trade, the Government will continue to ensure the maintenance of the high level of the workers’ rights, the European standards of protection of health, safety or the environment.”⁸ In the approach of the governments, we can see a noticeable emphasis on the comprehensive approach and consistency of the domestic and foreign policies.

In July 2015, the Government approved a new concept of foreign policy, *Koncepce zahraniční politiky ČR*.⁹ The concept sees the foreign relations as a set of activities of state and non-state actors and determines an important ambition “to contribute to the coherence of national policies with the international obligations of the Czech Repub-

lic".¹⁰ This ambition is especially important because one of the main sources of the foreign-policy influence is the ability to lead by example – especially if it is the influence in the countries undergoing fundamental transformation.¹¹ The main starting point is the membership in the EU, then the membership in the Euro-Atlantic space and multilateral organizations are important too.

The priority objectives include security, sustainable development, human dignity and human rights, services to citizens, and spreading the repute of the Czech Republic abroad.

In the new concept, Eastern Europe together with the Western Balkans are the only two territories, except for the EU and the US, which are presented as a direct part of the Euro-Atlantic space. Therefore, together with South-Eastern Europe (the Western Balkans), they are the only two territories, except for the EU and the US, which are presented as a direct part of the Euro-Atlantic space. The Czech Republic has the ambition "to promote and shape" the Eastern Partnership, where the priority countries are Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, due to their own decisions. The Concept indirectly sends out a message to Russia (that is not perceived there as a part of the Euro-Atlantic area but it ranks among "the other territories"). In the part about Eastern Europe, it is written: "*The Czech Republic, due to geographical, historical, economic, and strategic reasons, has a particular interest in security, stability, and prosperity in Eastern Europe. It respects the right to choose the orientation of foreign policy and integration preferences of the individual countries in the region. These cannot be enforced by external pressure and gross interference in their internal affairs. The Czech Republic will not accept violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries, which are in breach of the international law.*"¹²

Another important strategy approved by the Government in 2015 is the concept of the support for human rights and the transformation cooperation, *Koncepce podpory lidských práv a transformační spolupráce*. In comparison with the previous strategy, the objectives and tools are formulated more comprehensively – they include the environmental rights, the rights of sexual minorities, labour standards. Regarding the territorial priorities, they have not been fundamentally changed, while Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans are the only two regions that have been explicitly mentioned: "*Within the Programme of Transformation cooperation, the Czech Republic offers its experience to those countries that are culturally, geographically, historically or otherwise close to it. Therefore, it will primarily focus on the cooperation with partners in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans.*"¹³

The methodical instruction to the Concept lists the priority target countries: Burma, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Cuba, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine.¹⁴ The majority of those who are entitled to receive the Czech transformation assistance are the countries of Eastern, respectively South-Eastern Europe. In respect of the political atmosphere, even if the high constitutional officials had undertaken to coordinate their actions and seek to a unified foreign policy, there were opinion clashes, especially between the Government and the Castle.¹⁵ The problem was the different understanding of the importance of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict and of the democratic values. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs re-

peatedly talked in the spirit of the above-mentioned concepts, while the starting point of the presidential position was summed up by the director of the International Department of the Presidential Office, Hynek Kmoníček: *“With all the complexity of the situation in Ukraine, it seems that it concerns a treated influenza, which is extremely serious, but it is not a fatal disease of the European civilization. The Islamic State as an apocalyptic sect, which has attracted twenty-eight thousand Europeans to fight against us, is an absolutely incomparable risk.”*¹⁶

President Miloš Zeman questioned the seriousness of the actions of the Russian Federation, for example using the following words: *“an invasion is not about sending several hundreds of volunteers, an invasion is about at least one hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, five thousand tanks.”*¹⁷

But the dispute with the President goes deeper; several times in 2015, he presented his understanding of human dignity and values that the Czech Republic had declared since 1989. To the address of the people who were born in Europe, but their ancestors are of African origin, he said: *“Their original countries are still Algeria, Libya, or, if you want, Mali, simply because there is some genetic dependency. A Czech remains Czech even when living in France. While in the case of the Czechs there is no problem of a different culture, a Czech can well adapt to the life in France, see Milan Kundera, but the people of these countries do not have this adaptive capacity. This is not a criticism; it is a statement of fact.”*¹⁸

President Zeman celebrated 17th November, the Day of Struggle for Freedom and Democracy, in Albertov, Prague, in the company of the leader of Blok proti islámu, Martin Konvička.¹⁹ Konvička was prosecuted by the Czech police on suspicion of inciting hatred in his statements on social networks in the past few years.²⁰ The Prime Minister disapproved of the actions of the President and said that Zeman *“legitimised the spread of xenophobia and hatred in the totally extreme form”*.²¹ The result of the similar statements and actions of the President was that the image of the Czech Republic in the world has suffered a lot.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: AGENDA AND EVENTS

The European Union initiated the policy of Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009; the goal was to strengthen the ties with the six Eastern European countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Through the instruments of the EP, the EU has the ambition to promote reforms in the neighbouring countries, which would move their public administration and economy closer to the EU. The partners, in the event that the conditions are fulfilled, can obtain financial assistance, professional advice, and partial integration into the European common market; the perspectives for the EU membership have not been expected yet. In the EaP policy, the EU does not follow only the development goals – it sees them as an instrument of the security policy. Although the majority of the EP ambitions have not been fulfilled due to the shortcomings of the EU, the Eastern-European governments and the intervention of the Russian

Federation, it has recorded a few partial successes. In 2015, the main areas of concern of the Czech Republic were the situation in Ukraine. In February 2015, as a part of the so-called Normandy format (composed of Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande, and Petro Poroshenko), the second Minsk agreement was concluded – a set of measures that should achieve the de-escalation of the tension in Ukraine. The cease-fire was a part of the agreement, from 15th February 2015, it means the withdrawal of weapons and foreign armed forces and the Ukrainian constitutional reform towards de-centralization.²² The conclusions of this meeting were subsequently supported by the UN Security Council, which called on all involved parties to implement a package of measures and authorized the OSCE to perform monitoring.²³ A Special Monitoring Mission of the OSCE for Ukraine was prepared, at the request of the Ukrainian government established in March 2014, and from its interim reports, it is clear that cease-fire is repeatedly violated.²⁴ The greatest achievement is probably the work within the Trilateral Contact Group, which deals with the future challenges of safety, refugees and displaced persons, and economic renewal. Concerning the renewal of Ukrainian control of the external borders, the withdrawal of the Russian separatists and weapons, and the decentralization, there was minimal progress.²⁵

Despite the fierce security situation, the important phase in the process of affiliation was completed – the 17th EU–Ukraine summit in April 2015 that was the first associative summit (for the interim implementation of the association agreement from January 2016).²⁶ The summit dealt with the reform programme of the Ukrainian government and with the conflict in the eastern part of the country – the EU promised help in both issues. In Riga in May, the fourth summit of the EU leaders and the EaP was held. Although the main purpose was the discussion about the objectives and instruments of the European policy and about the expectations of the partners, the summit was marked by the ongoing Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. In the final statement, the partners say: *“The procedure against Ukraine and the events in Georgia since 2014 have shown that the basic principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders are not a matter-of-course on the European continent. The EU remains committed to promoting territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of its partners.”*²⁷

The partial successes in the integration with the EU are particularly visible in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, which are beginning to implement the association agreement, and where we can see gradual and deeper integration with the EU in its sector programmes (e.g. the educational programmes Erasmus and Horizon 2020). And this is why so many policy-makers and analysts talk about the differentiated attitude to various countries.²⁸

A sign of a certain acceptance of the current situation in the remaining countries is the October decision of the EU Council to cancel a part of the sanctions against the Belarusian regime, while the process continued in February 2016, when almost all restrictive measures were cancelled.²⁹ This step was taken because of a few friendly steps of the Lukashenko regime as well as due to the escalation of conflicts in other countries of the Neighbourhood (Ukraine, Syria) and the associated effort of the Union to reduce the tension.

The emphasis on stability, as the basis of the Neighbourhood Policy, is evident from the regular progress reports on the status and future prospects of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was published in November by the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and which is the result of consultations with official representatives and civil companies in the member and partner countries. The very first chapter deals with the “stabilization of the Neighbourhood”: *“In the next three to five years, the most urgent challenge, for many parts of the Neighbourhood, is stabilization. [...] Poverty, inequality, feeling of injustice, corruption, slow economic and social development, and the lack of opportunities, especially for young people, may be the roots of instability and they may increase the susceptibility to radicalization. The new ENP [European Neighbourhood Policy] will undertake determined efforts to support the economies and to improve the prospects for the local population.”*³⁰

The report contained the listing of ambitious targets and measures which affect almost every aspect of security and political modernization – reforms, including the issues of unemployment, ethnic equality, and climate changes. It presents direct tools for the strengthening of the relations in the EU-neighbourhood, but it notes that we cannot expect the solution to all the problems in the Neighbourhood from the EU itself. The report is somewhat modest in the description of the internal weaknesses of the EU – after all, the ENP is based, to a large extent, on the ambition of the EU to lead by example as well as on the acceptance of neighbours that the EU is that good example. Many of the problems, faced by countries in Eastern Europe, are unresolved even in the Union itself, even though the European Union as a whole is still in a better situation than Eastern Europe (political liberties, functioning of institutions, the welfare state, security); the insufficient attention to the ongoing maintenance of the particular pillars of the European welfare may change the situation rapidly. But between the freedom and prosperity in the EU and in the partner countries, there is a clear difference – here are some indicators.

Table 1:
**Index of the freedom of the press at the organization Reporters
without Borders (total number of countries: in 2013 – 177,
in the coming years – 180)³¹**

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016
Armenia	74	78	78	74
Azerbaijan	156	160	162	163
Belarus	157	157	157	157
Georgia	100	84	69	64
Moldova	55	56	72	76
Ukraine	126	127	129	107
Czech Republic	16	13	13	21

Table 2:
Index of the prosperity of the organization Legatum Institute
(in 2015, 142 countries were evaluated, the numbers in the table indicate
the global order of countries in particular categories)³²

Country	Over- all rank- ing	Econ- omy	Busi- ness and oppor- tunity	Gover- nance	Educa- tion	Health	Secu- rity	Per- sonal free- dom	Social capital
Armenia	93	126	69	92	49	86	55	119	124
Azerbaijan	71	51	70	94	82	68	71	92	80
Belarus	63	89	54	121	31	38	53	128	37
Georgia	80	119	71	43	66	82	57	72	139
Moldova	92	128	68	101	72	83	69	113	106
Ukraine	70	127	52	120	37	79	54	91	41
Czech Republic	26	26	29	34	13	26	24	45	66

Regional cooperation: The Visegrad Group (V4)

In the second half of 2015, the Czech Republic took over the rotating Presidency of the Visegrad Group. The Presidency considers Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine, to be a key part of the cooperation of V4: *“The most important area of foreign policy activities of the Visegrad Group is to focus on the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. During the Czech Presidency, V4 will implement actions to support the European orientation, and, as regards Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, the European perspective of the countries of the Eastern Partnership in line with the European Neighbourhood Policy, the review, in which the V4 countries will actively participate.”³³*

In addition to the specific support programmes of the Eastern-European modernization, the programme mentions Eastern Europe in the context of the external dimension of energy security, security and defensive cooperation, and the social dimension of the European integration. In the course of the year (and during the previous Slovak Presidency), the Eastern Partnership was mentioned in almost all publicly available declarations. The main attention was paid to Ukraine, in connection with the conflict with Russia on the one hand and in relation to its domestic modernization on the other hand. Its importance for the energy security of Europe was also emphasized.

The Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity were highlighted in several declarations of the deputies, ministers and prime ministers. In February, the representatives of the committees on foreign affairs of the V4 parliaments reached an agreement: *“The annexation of Crimea by Russia and the subsequent intervention in Ukraine have represented the most notable violation of the principles of the OSCE since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act.”³⁴* Another aspect of sovereignty is *“the sovereign*

right to choose the level of ambition in the relations with the European Union”, as reported by the foreign ministers of the V4 countries in the May Declaration.³⁵ The ambition to be at the forefront, to play an important role in the EU policy towards the Eastern Partnership, and to promote the modernization and transformation is evident in several declarations – including the joint statement of the ministers of foreign affairs after the meeting with NB8 (the Nordic-Baltic Group).³⁶

The security of Europe – both in terms of defence and energy – is another important accent of the V4 cooperation. The Visegrad Group was engaged in the support of the Ukrainian security through the NATO activities, and two dozen Ukrainian soldiers are part of the V4 EU Battle Groups.³⁷

The prospect of the EU membership for the Eastern partners has not been on the agenda so far and it is supported by V4. In November 2015, the ministers of foreign affairs of V4 wrote a letter. *“On your way to the EU, we offer you our helping hand”*, which was addressed to the civil companies in the Western Balkans and it was published in several local daily newspapers.³⁸ Among other things, the ministers wrote: *“We assure you that the crises faced by the EU at this moment, with the migration and refugee crisis belonging to the biggest challenges, will not be the reason to hesitate on our side when it comes to our support to the further enlargement of the EU.”* The citizens of the Eastern-European countries did not get a similarly cordial and direct letter yet.

The International Visegrad Fund continued to support the joint projects of organizations and individuals from the V4 countries and Eastern Europe through several grant schemes aimed at the development of civil society and the building of institutions of public administration, including universities.³⁹ Due to the limited resources (e.g. the total annual budget of the programme Visegrad University Studies Grant – EaP is 80,000 EUR), only modest results can be expected in the programmes.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: IDENTIFYING AND CHARACTERIZING THE ENGAGEMENT OF THE KEY ACTORS

In 2015, there were several bilateral meetings of the representatives of the Czech Republic and the Eastern Partnership, on various levels, including the regional ones.⁴⁰ Because of the attitude towards the Ukrainian crisis, the Czech Republic noticed several diplomatic disputes with Russia – an example is the May decision of the Russian Federation to prohibit the entry into its territory to approximately one hundred European politicians, including the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg, the former EU Commissioner, Štefan Füle, a Member of the party TOP 09, Marek Ženíšek, and a Member of the European Parliament, Jaromír Štetina.⁴¹ The Minister of Foreign Affairs asked the Russian Ambassador for an explanation.⁴² But the key element was the relation between Eastern Europe and the European Union. The association of the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood was negatively perceived mainly by the Deputies from Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy (KSCM).

The least controversial was the association agreement with Moldova – the Chamber of Deputies approved it unambiguously with 122 votes of the 128 present deputies (the majority of KSČM voted “for”), no deputy voted against, a few of them did not vote.⁴³ The agreement with Georgia was a bit more problematic. The Parliament ratified it in April 2015, the majority of the present governmental and opposition deputies voted “for” (116 of 168 present deputies), except KSČM. From KSČM, 25 deputies did not vote, only one deputy, Leo Lazar voted “for” the agreement. Thirteen deputies from the governmental parties did not vote, the only vote against the ratification was the vote of the Deputy of ANO, Roman Kubíček.⁴⁴ In May, the President signed both ratification documents.⁴⁵

In September 2015, the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic approved the association agreement between the EU and Ukraine, the Senate had ratified the treaty already in 2014.⁴⁶ Of the 138 present deputies, 107 ones voted for the ratification (70 votes were enough for the approval), only the deputies for KSČM voted against it.⁴⁷ President Zeman signed the agreement in November 2015, with the postscript: “*The Association Agreement is nothing more and nothing less than the fact that the negotiations on its approval will be commenced. In the case of Turkey, these negotiations last for about 20 years. [...] I do not want to estimate how long it will be in the case of Ukraine.*”⁴⁸ The Czech Republic is one of the last EU countries that ratified the agreement with the EU. The deputies of KSČM blocked the debate on the agreement in May 2015, one of the reasons was the denial of the current Ukrainian government.⁴⁹ The block of the Association Agreement by the Communists had its roots in ideological positions. It can be illustrated by the statement of the Chairman of KSČM, Vojtěch Filip: “*The decision of the Kiev authorities on the elimination of the Communist Party of Ukraine from the participation in municipal elections is a step that not only recedes Ukraine from Europe but also frustrates the hopes, at least of its association with the European Union. It is a completely undemocratic and unacceptable decision based on fear of a genuinely democratic party that has a chance, in the free competition of political parties, and on unacceptable discrimination that is in conflict with the international and European conventions on political rights and freedoms.*”⁵⁰ On the bilateral level, we choose three specific areas – migration, as it was the dominant topic of the Czech European policy in 2016, trade, and development help as it is directly associated with the Czech involvement in the Eastern Partnership.

The citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries are over-represented among people with valid international protection in the Czech Republic. From a total of 3,644 persons with valid international protection in 2015, there were 967, or nearly a third, from six Eastern European countries, the majority of whom are Ukrainians and Byelorussians.⁵¹ Regarding the requests for international protection received in 2015, the Czech Republic received a total of 1,525 requests, while the citizens of Ukraine constituted the largest number (694), followed by nationals of Syria (134) and Cuba (128).

Requests from other countries of the Eastern Partnership were less numerous: Armenia (44), Azerbaijan (6), Belarus (19), Georgia (20), and Moldova (21). Asylum was granted only in 24 cases (from the total number of 71 asylums granted in the

Czech Republic in 2015) and additional protection in 186 cases (from the total number of 399).

For the remaining candidates, the decision of the Czech authorities was negative or the proceedings were interrupted.⁵²

Regarding the other forms of registered residence, the Ukrainians make up almost half of foreigners from outside the EU who have lived in the Czech Republic for more than 12 months – 104,358 vs. the total number 263,163. The number of citizens from other countries of the Eastern Partnership living in the Czech Republic is in a few thousand (Belarus, Armenia, Moldova), or in a few hundreds (Azerbaijan, Georgia).⁵³ The Eastern Europeans are not directly affected by the wave of the anti-immigration rhetoric that hit the Czech Republic in the second half of the year.

The business relations are one of the important arguments that the Czech Government uses to justify its involvement in the Eastern Partnership. As stated by Minister Mládek in the debate on ratification of the agreement about the association with Georgia at the meeting of the Chamber of Deputies in March: *“The agreement is important for protecting the interests of Czech companies. [...] If we were not a member of the EU, we would have had to conclude agreements on investment protection, agreements on free trade, and agreements on preventing double taxation to support the Czech companies.”*⁵⁴

In 2015, the Czech Republic reached *“the largest volume of export in the history of the country”*.⁵⁵ The report of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, evaluating the implementation of the Export Strategy in 2015, identified the situation in Russia as a serious problem. But at the same time it states that *“the goal of most Czech exporters and interested institutions is to reduce the high dependence on the countries of the European Union by the enlargement of the portfolio of business partners to new markets”*.⁵⁶ In this way of thinking we can see the lack of understanding between the political and economic areas or the missing coordination of the political and economic goals. As already mentioned in this chapter last year, the Export Strategy adopted in 2012 set a goal to protect the economic interests of the Czech Republic by the diversification of the export and reducing the dependence on crisis zones but the Ministry of Industry and Trade in 2015 stated that *“the geopolitical tensions in the eastern part of Europe”* obstructed the work of the exporters.⁵⁷ The low willingness to participate in the cultivation of the common European space is not only a sign of failure to comply with political commitments, but it has problematic consequences for the economy too. According to the evaluation report of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the export to the EU countries increased in 2015, while *“the level of the Czech export to the countries outside the EU remained practically on the level of the previous year.”* Regarding the export to Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, this decreased in comparison with the previous year by 30%.⁵⁸ It is worth mentioning that the evaluation report of the Ministry of Industry and Trade identifies *“the ongoing conflict in Ukraine”*, the Russian and anti-Russian sanctions, and the development in the oil prices as a problem but it does not mention the aggression of the Russian Federation.⁵⁹ Two out of ten *“business missions”* carried out in 2015 were directed at the Eastern Partnership

countries – Ukraine and Azerbaijan. As for Azerbaijan, the Minister of Industry and Trade Mládek underlined the role of the country for the energy security of the Czech Republic.⁶⁰

In the development help, the countries of the Eastern Partnership belonged to the main recipients, but the Czech Republic is not a top donor in any of them. In 2015, the Czech Republic provided a total of 559.58 million CZK to the bilateral development cooperation.⁶¹ Among the programme countries, to which a long-term systematic attention has been paid, there is only one country of the Eastern Partnership, Moldova, where 77.04 million CZK were sent.

This is the highest amount of funds out of those provided to the programme countries – Afghanistan (21.94 million CZK), Bosnia and Herzegovina (70.16 million CZK), Ethiopia (60.31 million CZK), and Mongolia (32.6 million CZK).⁶² The assistance was aimed mainly at the sectors of water and sanitation and social services. The Czech Republic, due to the limitations of its resources, does not belong to the 10 top donors for the programme countries or the development cooperation – in the ranking of the top donors, the third place, just behind the institutions of the EU and US, is occupied by much poorer Romania.⁶³

Another category of recipients consists of the so-called project countries where the operation is less intense than in the programme countries. Georgia is the only state of the Eastern Partnership in this category, and, with 38.75 million CZK used in 2015, it was the biggest recipient of the Czech development aid – for comparison, Cambodia (16.99 million CZK), Kosovo (14.51 million CZK), Palestine (13.36 million CZK), Serbia (18.38 million CZK), and Zambia (11.58 million CZK).

After the outbreak of the conflict with Russia in 2014, Ukraine is ranked among the countries that receive “exceptional assistance”. At present, in the country there are ongoing projects within the programme of the Modernisation of the Public Education System, focused on the training of public administration representatives and material assistance to Ukrainian schools; the budget is 21.5 million CZK.⁶⁴ The exceptional assistance for Ukraine is provided on the basis of the government resolution from December 2014 and it should be provided until the end of 2016.⁶⁵

Ukraine was also the only country of the Eastern Partnership that was receiving the Czech humanitarian aid in 2015. Of the nearly 90 million CZK allocated to humanitarian aid, Ukraine was provided with 15 million CZK, making it the biggest recipient. The aid was used in projects supporting displaced people in the eastern part of the country. The humanitarian aid was provided through non-profit organizations – *Člověk v tísni*, ADRA, *Český červený kříž* and *Diakonie Českobratrské církve evangelické*.⁶⁶

Within the programme of transformation cooperation, the Czech Republic provided a total of 56.5 million CZK in 2015 and more than one-half of these funds went right into the Eastern Partnership countries. Ukraine was the biggest recipient (13.2 million CZK), followed by Belarus (8.8 million CZK), Georgia (6.3 million CZK), Moldova (3.97 million CZK), Azerbaijan (0.5 million CZK), and Armenia (0.3 million CZK). The supported activities concentrated mainly on the strengthening of the civil sector, including youth participation and free media.⁶⁷

As to those funds that, in 2004–2014, were sent into the Neighbourhood of the EU within bilateral aid, the Eastern Neighbourhood received 14% and the Western Balkans received 13% of the Czech aid. The share of the bilateral aid for Eastern Europe is lower than in the case of Poland, which, in that period, sent 33% of the total bilateral aid into this region, but it is higher than in the case of Hungary (10%) and Slovakia (6%).⁶⁸ It is necessary to add that, in case of all four countries, the bilateral aid forms a smaller part of the overall development cooperation – in the first decade of the membership in the EU, the multilateral aid reached 61% for the Czech Republic, 70% for Hungary, 73% for Poland, and 68% for Slovakia.⁶⁹

THE COUNTRIES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IN THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: THE PUBLIC AND MEDIA SPACE

In comparison with the previous year, the interest of the Czech public in the course of events in Ukraine was lower – because of the calming of the situation in Ukraine and thus the lower media coverage, and because of establishing new topics, mainly the refugee crisis and security concerns related to the attacks of the Islamic State.⁷⁰

In the discussion about the public and media background, we should mention one alarming factor. On the one hand, the Czech diplomacy, academics, and think tanks talk about Eastern Europe, in particular, as regards its relationship with the EU (associations, deeper integration, reforms, or sharing the Czech experience). On the other hand, European integration as a whole is not very likeable for the Czechs.

The Czech public has a negative attitude to the reception of refugees – in September 2015, 50% of the respondents were against the reception of refugees from war zones, and in December 2015 it was 60%.⁷¹ But the Ukrainians gain more sympathy than the people of the Middle East and North Africa; in September and in December 2015, 43% of the respondents agreed with the reception of the Ukrainian refugees, and the refugees from the Middle East and North Africa would be welcomed by 25% of the respondents in September and only 16% of the respondents in December.⁷² The Czechs do not like Ukraine a lot, in the autumn of 2015, only 4% of respondents thought that it was “very likeable“, and the overall grade on the scale from 1 (best) – 5 (worst) was 3,16.⁷³

Also, the view of the trust in the leaders on the international scene is quite interesting. In December 2015, Vladimir Putin with 24% had more trust than Angela Merkel (19%), Donald Tusk (15%) or Petro Poroshenko (8%). For the sake of completeness, 64% “do not trust” Putin, 68% Merkel, 25% Tusk, and 43% Poroshenko.⁷⁴

A change in the media interest can also be seen in the nominations and winners of the award *Novinářská cena* – where the articles about the refugee crisis dominated.⁷⁵

In autumn 2015, the data gathering for Eurobarometer 84 showed that only one-third (35%) of the Czechs feel “solidarity” with the European Union, compared to the European average of 49%.⁷⁶ Although a number of the Czech citizens feel to be Europeans or citizens of the EU, this does not mean support for deeper integration or joint actions externally (the EU to third parties). To illustrate the paradoxical at-

titudes toward integration and solidarity: the same survey showed that, even though the Czechs consider freedom of movement the highest added value of the EU, in the issue of the migration towards the Czech Republic they are least inclined to support it from the entire EU 28. Only 39% of them would welcome migrants from other EU countries (EU average is 55%) and 14% of them migrants from other countries.⁷⁷ The support for the expansion of the EU is on the level of 31% among the Czechs (the EU average rate is 53%).⁷⁸

The April survey of CVVM showed that, in terms of the practical implications of the EU membership, the Czechs have “an ambivalent attitude” in a number of areas.⁷⁹ In the same month, only 4% of the respondents answered the question “Do you believe that the EU decisions are in the interest of the people like you? – “I strongly believe, 25% answered “I quite believe”, 39% “I do not believe it too much”, 28% did not believe at all and 5% answered “I do not know”. It is interesting that, in comparison with the previous years (the oldest dates from 2004), the numbers are almost identical: during the period of approximately eleven years the answers were as follows: “I strongly believe, 2–5%; “I quite believe”, 25–32%; “I do not believe it too much”, 41–54%; “I do not believe at all”, 12–23%, and “I do not know”, 4–9%.⁸⁰ Last year, the evaluation of European integration could have been influenced by the statements of leading politicians, who, particularly on issues related to the refugee crisis, often used the anti-Brussels card and repeated that the Czech Republic should not be dictated by the quotas. To illustrate the public atmosphere, it should be noted that President Miloš Zeman was evaluated by the Czech public as the most prominent personality of 2015, with 58.5% of the votes, Andrej Babiš was in the second place with 42%, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka was in the third place with 19%.

In 2014, the order was the same, the percentage varied slightly – Zeman 57.5%, Babiš 40%, and Sobotka 14.5%.⁸¹

Another factor that could affect the evaluation of the European integration, concerns the propagandistic tools of the Russian Federation.⁸² The influence of the websites that manipulate the public opinion was not a subject of deeper academic investigation in the monitored period and even in the context of the above-mentioned data, which show that Czech society has long-term doubts about its Europeanism, it can hardly be considered to be the major, respectively a crucial factor.

CONCLUSION

Although the year 2015 in the Czech debate on the Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union was dominated mainly by the southern dimension (the Mediterranean), especially in relation to the refugee crisis, the Eastern policy underwent several changes. The Eastern Partnership was, as a priority anchored in the new concept – the concept of foreign policy and the concept of working in the EU. The countries of the Eastern Partnership belonged to leading recipients of the Czech development aid; in the case

of Ukraine, it concerns a fundamental shift in comparison with the period before the outbreak of the conflict in winter 2013.

In the context of party competition, there is no such politicization as last year (except the refusal of KSCM to support the association agreement with Georgia and Ukraine) and also the debate about the sanctions was milder. The most controversial statements, often in contradiction with the officially declared policy of the Czech Republic, came from President Zeman, who was the most popular Czech politician at the same time.

In the Council of the EU and within V4, the Czech Republic advocated the policy of the continuation of integration with Eastern Europe, both within the programmes to support the reforms, which bring those countries that are interested in the EU closer to the EU standards, and in the aspects of security including energy security. The main subject of interest was Ukraine and the important framework of the foreign-policy considerations of the ongoing conflict with Russia was formed by the OSCE principles, instituting the territorial integrity as one of the cornerstones in Europe.

In terms of further development, the most problematic aspect of the Czech Eastern policy is the uncertainty of the Czech Republic considering its place in the EU. The surveys, as well as the statements of a number of leading politicians, show that the Czech Republic, even after more than a decade after joining the European Union, fumble about the clear identification of the benefits of the membership and in the mechanism of fulfilling the rights and duties resulting from it. Given the fact that the foreign policy ambitions of the Czech Republic towards Eastern Europe are closely linked to the European integration of the region and the success of various sector policies, including the business one, is directly linked to the political integration, the above-mentioned uncertainty with respect to the location of the Czech Republic in Europe is not good news for the Eastern policy of the country.

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