
Introduction

Analysing the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy in 2017

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The year 2017 was the final year of the government of Bohuslav Sobotka (established in 2013 and made up of ČSSD [the Social Democrats], ANO 2011 and KDU-ČSL [the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party]).¹ While the political parties in this government had promised to provide stability and they achieved this goal throughout the majority of their term, from March 2017, political conflicts surrounding the leader of ANO 2011 and Minister of Finance Andrej Babiš had a major impact on the government's stability. Parliamentarians requested an explanation of the financial activities of the leader of ANO 2011 and there were calls for his resignation. PM Sobotka offered to resign to facilitate the demise of the whole cabinet and thus remove Babiš from his post.²

However, he changed his mind after seeing that President Zeman would most likely only accept his personal resignation, and thus Andrej Babiš remained in the government. Instead, PM Sobotka requested only the resignation of Andrej Babiš and preserving the government under a different Minister of Finance, who would be nominated by ANO. President Zeman publicly humiliated the PM by ignoring his request by accepting his personal resignation (though it had not even been submitted). He also refused to endorse the removal of Babiš from the government. This led to demonstrations across the country in May 2017. The governing political parties eventually reached an impasse in this matter. All these events affected the functioning of the government and the foreign policy decision making since the domestic political scene was destabilised and polarised.³

In the run up to the October general elections, as well as during the Czech pre-election presidential campaigns, there was an array of responses from the Czech foreign policy elites to the major trends taking place globally, especially in Europe and its neighborhood. Many hold a long-term view of the Czech foreign policy apparatus as being fragmented due to actions or statements of key actors which sometimes contradict the official policy of the country, as formulated by the Government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2017, it was particularly pertinent to maintain a united front that would support the commitments arising from strategic documents and the country's memberships

in organisations such as the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In such a changeable era, the clarity of the Czech position would ultimately contribute to a greater predictability and stability in foreign interactions. Nevertheless, there was a tendency to send out conflicting statements. This was the case especially with President Miloš Zeman, as his contradictory statements often confused not just foreigners, but also the Czech officials and public. The reader can find specific examples of such behaviour in individual chapters of this publication.

When the team of contributors to this eleventh volume of *Czech Foreign Policy Analysis* considered how and why the Czech Republic responded to external challenges, and whether it contributed to the preservation of a multilateral and inclusive global and regional order, the answer, predominantly, was that the foreign policy decision-makers opted for a *reactive* foreign policy. This policy ranged from a complete acceptance of external policy through some kind of adaptation to it to an active resistance to external policy, which we could clearly see in the country's fierce rejection of the temporary relocation scheme (the refugee quotas) in the EU.

To some extent, we could forgive the Czech foreign policy-makers for using a rather reactive than proactive strategy in pursuing the foreign policy priorities in some areas since as opposed to the previous year; they were facing an even more uncertain international environment in 2017. As such, it was beyond their capacity to single-handedly alleviate some transnational threats or rely on established multilateral formats. Globally, they had to deal with the foreign establishments of dominant players, in which the United States and China contested traditional approaches to foreign policy-making.

US President Donald Trump, in his inaugural speech on 20 January 2017,⁴ pledged to do things in foreign policy differently than his predecessor and apply an 'America First' approach, and he has delivered on this pledge by questioning all major trade agreements and gradually undermining the US commitments to climate change and nuclear non-proliferation, as well as demanding a rebalancing of the burden sharing among the US's allies. His unpredictable behaviour often left his domestic and international audiences puzzled.

China, led by President Xi Jinping, declared a *new era* in Chinese foreign policy on 18 October 2017, asking for a *new type of major country relations* – ultimately, it asked other countries to respect China's core interests.⁵ The Czech Republic has been involved in Beijing's Belt and Road initiative (also known as One Belt, One Road [OBOR]), which aims to connect Asia and Europe through several different investment and infrastructure projects. Here, the Czechs have participated in a platform called 16+1. This co-operation includes EU and non-EU member states and it generated some criticism from Brussels and even domestically for 'dividing' the EU member states and influencing their joint position vis-à-vis China.⁶

Perhaps, our primary attention should be directed toward the Czech membership in the EU, which, on 25 March 2017, marked the 60th anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, the foundations of the Union we know today. This milestone calls for starting a debate on future scenarios for Europe. This provides an opportunity for the Czech Republic to be more *proactive* and impose its own policy or at least

mediate when it comes to formulating common policies within the Union. Yet, to be constructive, the Czech Republic should work with the evolving strategies and policy documents of the EU, especially in times when the EU is unable to find a lasting – and acceptable for all – solution to the ongoing migration crisis. Additionally, the United Kingdom's decision in March to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, which enables a country to leave the EU, continues to be a major preoccupation.

This book identifies the key developments in the priority areas and themes, as outlined in the 2015 *Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy*.⁷ The authors use the same structure in their respective chapters throughout the book to assess the political context and major agendas and events, characterise the key actors, and provide an overview of the media and public space in connection with the chapter's topic. They also provide their recommendations in regard to the topic. To assess the ways the Czech Republic acts in its foreign policy, the contributors used the same methodology as in the previous four years. The matrix of possible actions and the explanation are described below, followed by a brief overview of the trends which affected the decision-makers in 2017.

METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the ways the Czech Republic acted in its foreign policy in 2017, the contributors used the following *matrix of possible foreign-policy "actions"*:

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

On the first axis, we differentiate proactive action, "no" action and reactive action in foreign policy. On the second axis, we differentiate offensive, neutral and cooperating foreign policies based on the attitude of the country towards the international environment.

Proactive – No action – Reactive

A proactive foreign policy is initiated by the country's own ideas about how foreign policy should look. In this case, the ideas about the meaning and purpose of foreign

policy are based on domestic sources rather than on external stimuli or external expectations. The risk of a proactive foreign policy is the possible underestimation and marginalisation of external limitations and opportunities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Offensive – Neutral – Cooperating

On the second axis, we distinguish between offensive, neutral and cooperating foreign policies. An offensive policy is characterised by confrontational behaviour towards the external environment. A negative delimitation towards the external environment can be a consequence of the country’s active efforts to impose its own idea of a certain policy on the external world. An offensive policy can also be a consequence of

a negative response to external stimuli. In general, a confrontational policy tries to sustain its own policy or even to enforce it toward (or force it on) the external world.

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

A cooperating policy can come in three forms: active, passive, and reactive. An active cooperating policy means that a country acts as a leader: it actively proposes a common policy. The impulses for an active cooperating policy include state stimuli (rather than responses to the external environment), but in this case, the country does not promote its idea offensively (by forcing it on others), but it rather looks for and builds coalitions and a wider support for its proposals.

A passive cooperating policy corresponds with the position of a fare dodger. The fare dodger is passive and not active, does not respond to external stimuli and does not develop his or her own activity. The policy of a fare dodger, however, is cooperating at the same time – even if the actor remains passive, they realise the benefits of the common policy. Otherwise, they could not travel. Finally, a reactive cooperating policy has the form of a complete acceptance of the external policy.

In terms of the process of foreign policy formation, it can be normatively stated that the best policy is the active-cooperating policy, followed by mediation, and the worst are the ignorant one and that of the fare dodger; but in accordance with the circumstances and the specific agenda, there are other modes of behaviour between these two poles.

POLITICISATION AND POLARISATION

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

Therefore, the unifying questions are 1) whether entire areas of the analysis or its parts are politicised, not politicised or depoliticised; and 2) whether we can experience a polarisation of political views in the given area. Below we describe the conceptualisation of the key terms (politicisation and polarisation).

Politicisation

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

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

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

Polarisation

The third concept is polarisation, which will be monitored in individual chapters, where we ask if the polarisation in the given case is institutional (it is typically institutional in cases of the Parliament versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Trade versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Government Office of the Czech Republic versus the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc., or at the level of trade unions).

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

- when the determining political actors (especially political parties and their leaders) and institutional actors (the president, the prime minister, ministers, the ministries, etc.) have a consistent position in regard to which the particular actors unite and identify themselves with each other, and the principle of internal discipline is promoted in the decision-making (instead of factual arguments, but the solidarity with the party is still promoted);

- also, when the political/institutional actors insist not on merely different but on contradictory opinions (e.g. being for or against the expansion of the EU), the de facto de-bate on the issue is missing and the policy is blocked, or it goes in one direction that significantly changes after the change of the governments (discontinuity of foreign policy);
- when it is not the particularities that are important but the fundamental direction of the policy (e.g. a principled openness towards Russia versus anti-Russian attitudes, and it is not the extent of the support of exports to Russia or of the visa-free contacts that is important here), or the fundamental individual act (e.g. whether we are for or against the radar in Brdy, or the Fiscal Pact);
- when the period of such an attitude has lasted at least throughout the period monitored by us (for the calendar year), or longer, if that is possible.

THE CZECH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE ERA OF UNCERTAINTY

As was previously stated, the global environment has become even more uncertain under the leadership of President Trump, although the experts acknowledge that the world started to accept his style as the “new normal” and there are signs that the community is becoming more accustomed to China’s proactive foreign policy, which might ultimately challenge the position of the US in the future. This is not likely to happen anytime soon; however, the dynamics between these global powers also affects the EU, which is insecure about its future in light of the UK’s withdrawal. This book is structured into three parts: in the first two parts, the European and global dimensions, respectively, are analysed through specific bilateral relations, and the third part deals with specific priority areas. Each part includes six chapters.

In the first chapter, Jan Kovář and Zdeněk Sychra set the tone for the Czech European policy by arguing that in 2017 there were numerous challenges that resonated from the previous year, such as the migration crisis or Brexit. The general position of the Czech government, the opposition and other relevant actors on individual aspects of EU migration and asylum policy has not changed from the previous year. A detailed discussion of the position is provided in last year’s edition of this series.⁸ In 2017, the government continued to fiercely reject the temporary relocation scheme (the so-called refugee quotas) and insisted that, as former PM Sobotka put it, “*mandatory quotas should not be part of the European asylum system in the future*”.⁹ The main argument was still that the Czech government perceives the system as non-functional. Instead, the Czech Republic perceives an effective return policy, external border protection and an effective asylum policy (whatever it may be) as the real functional instruments to solve the refugee and migration crisis.¹⁰

The Czech position remained the same even after the new government was formed in December 2017, although the new PM Andrej Babiš is even more vocal than his predecessor when it comes to stressing that the fight against human smugglers is the real solution to the crisis.¹¹ The PM maintained that the crux of the solution, according to the Czech government, lies in the strengthening of the external border protection

so that the EU “*is able to stop illegal immigration*” into its territory.¹² The argumentation seems at least a bit inconsistent since those covered by the (temporary) relocation scheme are people who have applied for international protection in the EU and as such cannot be considered illegal immigrants at least until their applications have been processed.¹³ The proposed long-term future-looking solution – to protect external borders more effectively – in no sense solves the current crisis situation, which is characterised by a large number of already present migrants and refugees. At the same time, the Czech Republic rejects the argument that it does not exert solidarity towards other EU member states in the field of migration and asylum despite refusing the relocation of refugees. In fact, most of the Czech migration policies in 2017 revolved around showing other means of solidarity that supposedly make up for rejecting the relocations.

According to the government, the country helps the hardest crisis stricken EU member states by providing technical, financial and personal help.¹⁴ Moreover, it helps to improve the refugee conditions in the countries of origin and transit and supports by various means the protection of the EU's external border via the European Border and Coast Guard.¹⁵ As mentioned, the Czech migration and asylum policy focussed on providing alternative means of solidarity, which has often underlined the country's preference for the externalisation of this policy to third countries.¹⁶ Bohuslav Sobotka together with the Prime Ministers of the remaining V4 countries sent a letter to the Italian PM Paolo Gentiloni offering help regarding measures in Libya since the movements of immigrants during the past year were mostly from Libya to Italy. In connection with this, the Czech government offered to provide up to CZK 24 million to reinforce and train the Libyan border guards since according to Bohuslav Sobotka they have the “*advantage of being able to return captured vessels with refugees back to the Libyan coast*”.¹⁷

One of the problems of these alternative instruments of intra-EU solidarity concerning immigration and asylum issues is that practically all EU member states exert such alternative means of solidarity. They are by no means exclusive to the Czech Republic or other countries rejecting relocation as a means of solidarity. It is therefore doubtful whether such alternative means can compensate for the unwillingness of Czech government to participate in the relocations. At the same time, the Czech government often maintains that it contributes to the European Border and Coast Guard, provides bilateral expert help, and therefore still shows its solidarity with other EU member states. In fact, EU rules require all member states to participate in the protection of the external borders regardless of whether they share an EU external border (not counting international airports) or not. Complying with the duty to participate in these activities can thus hardly be sold as alternative means of solidarity despite the fact that the Czech government always maintained that the relocations should be voluntary.

Like in the year before, in 2017 Brexit was an issue of the EU policy agenda that continuously attracted the attention and focus of Czech politicians. It is worth mentioning that a unique agreement of the government and all major political parties represented in the Parliament was formed before the discussion of the negotiation direc-

tives in the European Council. In February, the leaders of all the main parliamentary parties (ČSSD, ANO, KDU-ČSL, ODS, KSČM, and Úsvit – Národní koalice) adopted a common declaration on the negotiation of the United Kingdom's exit from the EU.¹⁸ The declaration was also addressed to the Czech MEPs and eventually was attached to the Czech government's mandate for the Brexit negotiations.¹⁹ The final Czech mandate thus stemmed from the debate and declaration of the representatives of the parliamentary parties and the Office of the Government's expert group for Brexit.²⁰

The common declaration of the leaders of the parliamentary parties towards the Brexit negotiation, and by extension towards any EU issue, can be seen as a rather unusual occurrence within the Czech European policy. Only rarely is there a common Czech position on EU issues that would crosscut party lines. The leaders of the main Czech parties saw the common declaration as improving the Czech position in the European Council for the adoption of negotiation directives since it can be presented as a "*cross-section agreement of all political forces in the Chamber of Deputies*".²¹ The overarching Czech priority for the Brexit negotiations was to establish a balanced, close and mutually benefiting relationship between the EU and the UK.²² Moreover, the Czech position also required an agreement in the European Council that member states should not pursue bilateral negotiations with the UK so as not to undermine the common EU position.²³

Probably the main priority for the first phase of the negotiations was the protection of Czech citizens living in the UK. Again, this was uncontroversial at the EU level since it is a valence issue and it was unlikely that any member state would not want to ensure a high level of protection of the rights of its citizens.²⁴ A specific requirement for the Brexit negotiations was to ensure the maintaining of already acquired rights not only for Czech residents but also for Czech students, academic workers and other Czech citizens living in the UK. In the Czech view, the negotiation on the rights of Czech and EU citizens residing in the UK has to reflect the fact that they "*made a decision with a legitimate expectation [that the United Kingdom would remain an EU member state] and used their rights stemming from their [EU] citizenship and the Czech membership in the EU*".²⁵

In such a context, the Czech Republic looked closely at the responses coming from its immediate neighbors: Austria, Poland, Slovakia and Germany. Vít Dostál examined the developments in Central Europe and concluded that the importance of the Visegrad cooperation in the Czech foreign policy had grown. However, the tendencies of Poland and Hungary to be critical of the EU and the rise of far-right and populist political forces in the elections in Austria did not find many supporters in the Czech domestic political circles. The polarising nature of such an arrangement should have pushed the country towards more constructive diplomatic manoeuvring in the EU in order to help mitigate the negative image of the grouping.

In spite of the two countries' good neighbourship and friendly co-operation, the Czech-German relations experienced major disagreements over the migration crisis in the pre-election campaigns on both sides. Jana Urbanovská wrote that as a result, there was a likelihood of "long-term" scars on both the social and political levels. The re-election of Chancellor Angela Merkel, Urbanovská argued, was the better of two

possibilities for the Czech Republic, as the Czechs would have faced a more assertive approach pushing them to accept refugees and/or take part in a tighter co-operation within the eurozone should the Social Democrat Martin Schulz have won the elections. Also, while there was predominantly a condemnation of the rise of the ring-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the Czech Republic, the Czech conservatives and eurosceptics, primarily led by the far-right anti-immigration and anti-Islam Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD) of Tomio Okamura, praised the political success of AfD.

The political developments in France and the United Kingdom and their changing roles in Europe, and their effects on these countries' ties with the Czech Republic are the topic of Monika Brusenbauch Meislová and Eliška Tomalová's chapter. Their subtitle 'More EU or Less EU?' suggests the ongoing dilemma of many EU nations. In the Czech European/EU policy, it was important to follow the presidential elections in France. In the end, after defeating the Front National's leader Marine Le Pen, France's new pro-European president Emmanuel Macron focused on EU-related topics. As for the UK, Brexit influenced the UK-Czech bilateral diplomacy – and it was noted that there was a slight increase in high-level meetings between the two countries. This could suggest that the UK is trying to build direct ties with other countries, and that there now might be more incentives for it to look for common interests when its foreign policy is expected to become more independent outside the EU framework.

The Balkans and Turkey experienced some mixed attention from the Czech foreign policy actors in 2017. Dopita and Heller looked at the Southeast dimension of the Balkans and determined that it remained essential in the Czech foreign policy in 2017, with outstanding disputes surrounding Serbia and Kosovo. In this case, the foreign policy actors took different sides: the MFA's diplomats showed a more co-operative approach towards Kosovo; in contrast, President Zeman spoke of the illegitimate status of Kosovo while openly supporting the Russian annexation of Crimea. Meanwhile, Tamchynová, in the same chapter, concluded that the increasingly nationalistic and anti-EU rhetoric in Turkey, which was underpinned by clashes with the EU member states, ran in parallel to the EU-Turkish co-operation on controlling migration to the EU.

In his chapter, Svoboda labelled the Czech foreign policy towards the Eastern Partnership states as one of *diminishing interest*. Overall, there is an EU-wide lack of agreement on dealing with the EaP, with some concern about the slow reforms in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. The EU institutions were the primary drivers of developing EaP programmes; however, the individual states in the EaP rely on building stronger bilateral relations that would help with their capacity building. As for Ukraine, there was the controversial approach of President Zeman vis-à-vis the Russian takeover of Crimea at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in October 2017. At the Assembly he declared that the annexation was *a fait accompli* and that Ukraine should seek some compensation from Russia instead of a regaining of Crimea. This caused a stir among the Ukrainian representatives, and led to an objection from Russia and domestic criticism from all the major Czech foreign policy representatives, who viewed it as being in contradiction with the government's view.

President Zeman upheld his active approach towards Russia amid the heightened tensions between Brussels and Moscow. In connection with this, Kratochvíl and Svoboda explored the dynamics between the President, the public opinion and Czech anti-Kremlin forces in their chapter and concluded that these forces limited his influence on the day-to-day policy towards Russia. They also rightly pointed out that this particular agenda was closely watched by international media, and due to the President's controversial statements, there was an incorrect reading of the Czech foreign policy in other countries. This only contributes to the long-term view that the Czech foreign policy is fragmented. Yet, the Czech foreign policy actors' good understanding of the countries in the Eastern Partnership and Russia should give them a very prominent position as mediators between the West and Russia.

Jan Hornát described the United States in the Czech foreign policy as *navigating the transition year*. The related Czech agenda requires careful and constant monitoring of the positions coming from the Trump administration. President Trump's messages to the US allies in Europe were and continue to be confusing. The approach from the Czech side in this matter was mostly proactive and co-operative, especially in areas that required some defence contribution related to the defence budget, helping to strengthen NATO's eastern flank and engagement in the Middle East. But there was more uncertainty in relation to multilateralism in this respect. President Trump's vocal opposition to many multilateral agreements led to a more reactive and offensive approach from the Czech Republic, and this is most likely an area that will define the intensity of the interactions should the US continue in such an individualistic approach in the future. The Czech Republic can find a greater understanding in this regard in the EU, which continuously stresses the importance of multilateral commitments.

In their chapter, Čejka, Daniel and Lubin attempted the impossible – to summarise the complexities of the Middle East and the Maghreb in the Czech foreign policy. They did not spot any significant shifts from previous years in this area but they called for a more balanced approach to it. Mostly following the EU's positions, more proactivity on the part of the Czech Republic was visible in relation to Israel and, to a lesser extent, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Libya. Otherwise, the primary example of the Czech Republic contradicting the EU in regard to the Middle East was the Czech vote in support of the status of Jerusalem. Its deviation from the EU position was also visible in the case of Syria, where the Czech Republic maintains ties with the Syrian government.

Kateřina Ženková Rudincová characterised the Czech foreign policy in Sub-Saharan Africa as continuous and opined that the relations should deepen. In this region, there were no themes that were politicised or polarised in 2017. The region, however, is important as an identified security priority in the Concept from 2015. Equally untarnished is the Czech interaction with Latin America, although the linkages are somewhat limited. Martin Hrabálek reported a *return to a growing trade* with this region and suggested that economically the Czech Republic demonstrated a more proactive policy toward it in 2017.

The MFA's Territorial Department "Asia Pacific" focusses on a range of countries in the Asia-Pacific and it was somewhat challenging to come up with an informed

analysis of the whole area. Under these circumstances, Rudolf Fürst, Alica Kizeková and David Kožíšek divided between themselves the task of adequately assessing the Asia-Pacific countries listed as noteworthy in the strategic documents. By far, China dominated the related discourse, and the views of it were politicised and polarised. In comparison, there was a more positive outlook on Japan and the Republic of Korea, and a somewhat lacking interest in intensifying ties with India and the distant Australia. There is also a great potential in Central Asia and Southeast Asia in terms of business, cultural and educational exchanges. The authors concluded that there was *an improved balance* with the region compared to the previous year; however, in many cases, the relations had a *mostly unfulfilled potential*.

In all the chapters in parts one and two, the contributors considered the economic and security dimension. The year 2017 was viewed as one of proactivity in both areas. Štěpánka Zemanová and Miloslav Machoň stated that the external economic relations were continuously proactive; however, questions remained in relation to the institutional architecture in the Czech Republic. When it comes to finance, the defence sector tends to suffer the shortcomings. Lukáš Dyčka highlighted the pressure from the US for the Czech Republic to increase its military spending. This issue was constantly brought up at various events where the state of the Czech defence capabilities and funding was discussed in 2017. While the commitment to increase defence spending was declared on many occasions, the level of contributions from the GDP to defence is still noticeably below the promised amounts.

There are some foreign policy dimensions that do not get as much attention, such as human rights and development. Veronika Bílková concluded that the year 2017 was one of *'underused potential'* in the Czech human rights foreign policy. Meanwhile, Jan Werner spoke about Czech development as a *'well-performed non-priority, once again'*. The country has the strategic documents and frameworks for it in place, but what is slacking is the interest in it in the fragmented political scene. Both authors concluded that they were pessimistic in relation to the new government's approaches to these dimensions in the following year.

Lukáš Tichý, in his chapter on energy, showed more optimism in relation to the coherent approach of all the main actors in their positions on energy policies; there were only limited signs of politicisation or polarisation of these issues in 2017. The Czech Republic was supportive of multilateral energy projects in the EU and the V4, and it performed proactively and in a co-operative fashion in this respect on the bilateral level as well.

It happens that the chapter on public diplomacy concludes this book. As it is an all encompassing area of diplomatic practice covering all foreign policy dimensions, it was disheartening to read that the year 2017 was marked by *'lacking political support and long-term vision'* in this area; however, Jana Peterková and Eliška Tomalová also included in their chapter a more optimistic outlook and acknowledged the relatively large number of implemented activities and the proactive involvement of stakeholders in public diplomacy. Considering the divisive messaging coming from the Czech foreign policy actors in some priority areas, it was vital to provide more political support across the whole political spectrum to building a positive image for the Czech Republic.

In conclusion, at the time of concluding the analysis for this book, there was still a lot of uncertainty as to who would lead the foreign policy agenda and how. The experts on the Czech foreign policy concluded that while Andrej Babiš emerged as victorious out of the general elections in October 2017, he was going to face a major opposition in his efforts to form a stable government. The parties that would be willing to engage with ANO would be the Communists and the far-right extremists. This greatly complicates the image of the Czech Republic as these parties do not share the same view on how to approach the foreign policy priorities, as stated in the 2015 Concept Paper. The European policy is almost certainly bound to be pragmatic. More concerning is ANO's underdeveloped foreign policy and lack of interest in acting proactively. Given these circumstances, it will be up to the established foreign policy circles and individuals to continue the deepening of the bilateral ties and the gathering of more support for portfolios that have already received limited attention in 2017.

This book uses the names the Czech Republic and Czechia interchangeably. In the majority of cases of chapters with more than one author, the authors' names were listed in alphabetical order. The order does not reflect their academic titles or the sizes of their contributions.

Endnotes

- ¹ The previous years, 2013–2016, were covered in Kořan, M. (ed.) (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017) *Česká zahraniční politika v roce 2013 (2014, 2015, 2016). Analýza ÚMV [Czech Foreign Policy in 2013 (2014, 2015, 2016): an IIR Analysis]*. Prague: Institute of International Relations. That is to say, they were covered by the previous volumes in this series. Only the analysis of the year 2015 is available in English. The rest were published only in the Czech language.
- ² A summary of the background to the political dispute and the Czech governance can be found at Kopeček, L. (2018) *Country Profile: the Czech Republic 2018 (assessment of 2017)*. Nations in Transit. Freedom House. [online]. Available from: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2018/czech-republic>.
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