
Chapter 7

The United States in the Czech Foreign Policy

NAVIGATING THE TRANSITION YEAR

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Executive Summary: The year 2017 was mainly a transition year for Czech foreign policy towards the United States, as the Czech side was gradually getting acquainted with and monitoring the positions and perspectives of the new administration. President Trump's often ambivalent rhetoric regarding transatlantic relations and various multilateral frameworks has brought increased uncertainty as to what role Washington intends to play in the world and how it plans to co-operate with its global partners. Due to personnel changes in key offices in the executive branch of the US government, higher-level bilateral security, foreign policy and economic dialogues between the Czech Republic and the US did not take place during the year, albeit with a positive outlook for their resumption in 2018. During 2017, a part of the bilateral agenda consisted of preparations for the commemoration of one hundred years of official ties between the two countries, which will be celebrated throughout 2018. The bilateral trade with the US increased but ended with a deficit for the Czech side. The two countries' defence and security co-operation can also be rated as strengthened mainly due to the continuing activities of the Czech Republic in the Middle East.

INTRODUCTION

The inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the 45th President of the United States was unquestionably the event that framed the Czech-American relations throughout 2017. In connection with this, Donald Trump has brought to the White House a discursive framework that defied the political messages of previous US administrations and cast a shadow of ambivalence on the relationship of the US with the world and, more specifically, with its allies in Europe. Although each presidential transition is marked by shifts of priorities, policy ambiguity and even some initial chaos, it is debatable

whether the Czech side has ever had to navigate through such significant political and personnel changes in the executive branch of the US government since the end of the Cold War.

As a consequence, while our analyses of the Czech-American relationship in the previous few years have pointed to a certain level of *hollowing-out* and *inertia*,¹ the year 2017 marks an important moment in which some requisites of the relationship that have been taken for granted in the past need to be rethought and taken stock of. Whereas the working-level ties, the institutionalised co-operation programmes and the general substance of the relationship have rather expanded in some instances, some major changes took place on the political and personnel level and they were connected to the presidential transition in the United States.

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The presidential transition in the US requires the incoming president to fill up to four thousand executive branch positions – for the purposes of the Czech-American relations and for dealing with higher-level agenda, the key nominations (apart from the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence and the National Security Adviser) are those for the US Ambassador to the Czech Republic, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs and the Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs.

In the recent past, most US Ambassadors to the Czech Republic have been political appointees rather than career diplomats, and Donald Trump's nomination of the Ambassador in Prague did not diverge from this trend. Stephen B. King, whose nomination was confirmed in the Senate by voice vote, has mainly a business background, but he also has been an active member of the Republican Party and maintains strong ties with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Paul Ryan. In his nomination speech, King identified the Czech Republic as "*an unwavering American ally in the heart of the European continent*", commended Prague for going "*the distance in our strategy to defeat ISIS*" and for having "*supported sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine*" and emphasised that "*the Czech Republic should endeavour to increase the percent of its GDP devoted to defence*". He also acknowledged that "the once-resolute and indelible imprint of democracy spreading across central Europe in the 1990s has given way in some quarters to a current of skepticism and self-doubt".² Among the main priorities for Ambassador King is the building of new economic ties with the Czech Republic and the strengthening of the current ones.³

The Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs is an important position for carrying through activities higher on the working-level agenda – a longer-term vacancy in this position could hinder, for example, the Strategic Dialogues with European partners. Barack Obama's appointee for this position, Victoria Nuland, was replaced by Wess A. Mitchell,⁴ who, prior to joining the Trump administration, was the president and CEO of the Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) – a think-

tank which in recent years focussed, among other issues, on disinformation campaigns in Central and Eastern Europe.⁵ In his hearing before the Senate, Mitchell stated that he “will view as [his] central task the preservation and strengthening of the Western alliance” and noted that his “first priority will be to give weight and substance to the statements that the President, Vice President and the Secretaries of State and Defence have made affirming America’s commitment to NATO Article 5”.⁶

From the perspective of defence co-operation, the key positions of the Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Affairs and his Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for European and NATO Policy have been filled by mid-2017. In the former position, Robert S. Karem was confirmed by voice vote and in his remarks he mentioned that he was ready to “bolster and modernise critical alliances such as NATO while rebalancing burden-sharing within these alliances”.⁷ In the latter position, Thomas Goffus replaced James Townsend, who, for example, represented the US in the 2016 Czech-US High Level Defence Group dialogue.⁸

In the perspective of the transition, the consensus among Czech policy-makers as to the role and relevance of the United States in the Czech foreign policy remains unchanged from previous years. A special meeting in April on foreign policy questions that was attended by the Czech president, the speakers of the Senate and Parliament and the ministers of defence and foreign affairs, produced a joint statement whereby the officials agreed that “with regard to the new administration of the United States of America, [they] have agreed on the crucial importance of the Czech-American relations” and reiterated that the two countries “have long had an extraordinarily strong relationship that the Czech Republic will want to further develop with the incoming administration, including by enlarging the bilateral contacts at the highest level and strengthening the economic and the defence dimensions of the relationship.”⁹

The Czech side also conducted a change in the ambassadorial posting in Washington, D.C., where Petr Gandalovič was replaced after six years of service by Hynek Kmoníček, who left his position as the Director of the Foreign Affairs Department in the Office of the President of the Czech Republic and previously served as the Czech Ambassador to Australia, India and the United Nations. Kmoníček identified his primary long-term goal in the US as “merging the mental with the real geographic map [...]. On the real map we are west of Vienna. In the mental map many people still see us as being somewhere in the east of Europe.”¹⁰

The Czech parliamentary elections were another notable variable that needs to be taken into account when looking at the Czech-US relationship in 2017.¹¹ A topic that resonated among a significant portion of Czech voters was the possibility of passing a law on a general referendum, which was most vocally supported by the Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) party, which gained a rather surprising 10.6% of the vote. Notably, the SPD is a party that questions the Czech membership in NATO and the EU and their proposed referendum would serve as a platform for citizens to voice their preferences regarding these issues. In the context of various disinformation campaigns combined with a lack of critical thinking among some voters, a potential referendum on the Czech membership in NATO could be detrimental for the country’s security

ties to the United States. The rhetoric surrounding the elections regarding the referendum thus lead to an increased polarisation of political parties and the public on the position of the Czech Republic in the current security framework.

However, in the party election programmes the focus on and acknowledgment of the importance of the Czech transatlantic relationship remained substantial – the ANO movement (29.6% of the vote),¹² TOP 09 (5.3% of the vote)¹³ and the Civic Democrats (ODS; 10.8%)¹⁴ explicitly mentioned the necessity to expand and strengthen transatlantic ties. Whereas STAN (5.2%)¹⁵ and the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL; 5.8%)¹⁶ did not mention the transatlantic ties per se, they upheld the NATO membership and reiterated that the country shall meet its commitments within the alliance. The Social Democrats (ČSSD; 7.3%)¹⁷ and the Czech Pirate Party (10.8%)¹⁸ were referring to NATO in terms of strengthening the position of the country within the organisation and at the same time complementing NATO with European defence structures. Thereby, only two parties that have seats in the parliament – SPD and the Czech Communist Party – question the merits of the Czech membership in NATO and the transatlantic community. In its programme SPD spoke of NATO in connection with the referendum and mentioned the need to rethink our activities within the organisation.¹⁹ Meanwhile the Communist Party called for the outright termination of the Czech membership in NATO and mentioned its support for a referendum on NATO membership.²⁰

As is evident from the information above, 2017 was a transition year on both sides of the relationship. In that context, the main task for the Czech foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the United States was trying to read into the new administration, while upholding existing ties and attempting to maintain a common view on key international issues, such as the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, or the Paris Climate Change Agreement (COP 21).²¹

AGENDA AND EVENTS

Were it not a transition year, it would have been expected that the bilateral co-operation would continue with holding traditional annual meetings – the Strategic Dialogue²² between the two countries, the fourth Economic and Commercial Dialogue²³ between the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade and its US counterpart and the High Level Defence Group²⁴ meeting. These meetings, however, did not take place in 2017, mostly due to the fact that the relevant positions in US Departments were not yet filled. Nevertheless, the next meetings in these formats are being planned for 2018.²⁵

Among the first high-level meetings of 2017 between a Czech minister and his US counterpart was Foreign Minister Lubomír Zaorálek's encounter with Rex Tillerson at the sidelines of the ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in Washington, D.C.²⁶ Zaorálek also met with the Deputy National Security Advisor K.T. MacFarland and other officials from the recently inaugurated administration, and apart from discussing the Czech participation in the global fight against terrorism, Za-

orálek allegedly discussed with them the terms of a possible visit of the Czech President Miloš Zeman in Washington, D.C. – a visit which did not materialise in 2017.²⁷

Foreign Minister Zaorálek's trip was nearly parallel to the trip of the Minister of Transportation Daniel Ťok, who held bilateral negotiations with the US Department of Transportation, where he discussed the safety of autonomous vehicles, and their development and testing. The minister also met with the representatives of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and discussed with his US colleagues the reduction of energy consumption in the field of transportation, which shall reduce the dependency of NATO member states on energy sources.²⁸

In early May, the Czech Minister of Defence Martin Stropnický met his counterpart James Mattis in the Pentagon. The Czech side arrived with a pledge to increase its defence budget in order to meet the NATO spending requirements – an issue in which the incoming US administration was most vocal towards its transatlantic allies and critical of their *free-riding* on US defence assurances.²⁹ Mattis, on the other hand, recognised and acknowledged the Czech activities in Iraq and Afghanistan – namely the involvement of the Czech Special Forces, medics and air advisory team in Iraq.³⁰ The purpose of the meeting was rather introductory and the NATO-related agenda dominated over bilateral issues.³¹

The Czech Minister of the Interior Milan Chovanec also visited the US and met with the Assistant Secretary for International Engagement of the Department of Homeland Security James Nealon, with whom he discussed the issues regarding the fight against terrorism and border protection. The most reported aspect of Chovanec's trip was his handing over of a financial gift (USD 237,437) from the Czech Government to the Czech community in Texas that had been hit by Hurricane Harvey.³²

Also, the first exchange within the *Legislative Leaders Program* – which is an initiative of American Friends of the Czech Republic (AFoCR), which aims to strengthen relations and ties between Czech political leaders and their counterparts – took place in May and was attended by Ondřej Benešík (KDU-ČSL) and Pavel Šrámek (ANO).³³

Although there was no official high-level visit from the US to the Czech Republic in 2017, we should particularly note that there was an increase in contacts at the level of individual US states, which take the form of independent incoming missions. In 2017 Florida and Nevada, for example, sent their business delegations to the Czech Republic, where their meeting with their Czech counterparts was facilitated by the MFA.³⁴ Such exchanges bring positive results in terms of opening opportunities for Czech companies to invest and expand into the US market and production chains – a key task as the Czech Republic aims to move up the global value chains.

Security

In the context of Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric about NATO being *obsolete*, the European partners sought a clear commitment of the administration to NATO's Article 5, while Trump himself implicitly made the commitment contingent upon NATO partners' increases in defence spending. In connection with this, the joint statement produced at the aforementioned meeting of top Czech policymakers on foreign policy

issues stated that the leaders “*expect that a clear confirmation of the importance of NATO and the transatlantic alliance will be delivered at the upcoming NATO summit of heads of state and government.*” The statement made sure to mention that “[i]n light of the upcoming Brussels meeting, the officials confirmed the gradual increase in Czech defence spending.”³⁵ While Trump did not arrive to the May summit in Brussels with an explicit reassurance of the US commitment to Article 5, he did so a few weeks later in Warsaw, Poland – as Poland is one of the only five NATO members that fulfil the target of spending at least 2% of their GDP on defence.³⁶ The Three Seas Initiative Summit, which Donald Trump visited while in Warsaw, was also attended by the Speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies Jan Hamáček, who thus became the first Czech politician to meet with the incoming president.³⁷

In part to cater to Donald Trump’s demands for increased NATO activity and also to demonstrate that the alliance is still relevant to US security interests, NATO announced that it would formally join the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which was set up by the US in 2014.³⁸ The decision was declared amidst the Brussels summit Trump attended and was preceded by the Coalition’s ministerial meeting in Washington, D.C., wherein Lubomír Zaorálek took part.

For the fourth consecutive year, the Czech Republic hosted and led joint trainings with its NATO partners under the label Ample Strike. In 2017, Ample Strike was attended by 1300 military personnel from eighteen allied states, including the United States, which engaged its AH-64 Apache helicopters and B-1 and B-52 strategic bombers there.³⁹ As for NATO missions that are particularly of interest to the United States, the Czech Republic is active in Operation Resolute Support – a training, advisory and assistance mission in Afghanistan. As of May 2017, the Czech Republic contributed 223 troops to the mission⁴⁰ and in November – as a reaction to a US demand for NATO allies to increase their troop numbers for the mission – the Czech Minister of Defence Stropnický announced that the number could be increased by dozens of new troops – a step that would have to be approved by the Parliament.⁴¹ Also, to support NATO’s mission to reinforce the alliance’s eastern flank – the so-called Enhanced Forward Presence – in July the Czech Parliament authorised the deployment of up to 290 troops in Lithuania and Latvia, with the mandate starting on 1 January 2018 and ending on 31 January 2019.⁴²

On a bilateral level the United States has appreciated the role of the Czech Republic in maintaining training and medical missions in Iraq and providing financial assistance. For instance, in the first half of 2017 the Czech military Field Surgical Team was embedded with American forces at a base in Iraq’s Anbar Province – which is very close to the front line in the fight against the Islamic State.⁴³ Also, in connection to the sale of the Czech-produced L-159 ALCA light attack aircraft to Iraq, the Czech Republic maintains an Air Advisory Team of circa thirty personnel in Iraq as part of Operation Inherent Resolve.⁴⁴ The Czech financial and material assistance to Iraq has been aimed at political stabilisation,⁴⁵ migration issues⁴⁶ and the provision of ammunition.⁴⁷ In relation to the US-Czech co-operation in the region of the Middle East, the Czech Republic (through its Embassy in Damascus) has maintained the status of

a *protecting power* for the United States, and the Czech Ambassador in Syria Eva Filipi remains a valued channel and consultant for Washington.⁴⁸

The State Partnership Program that connects the National Guards of US states with the armies of partner states remains a solid foundation in the Czech-US security ties. The Czech Army maintains a partnership with the National Guards from Nebraska and Texas and various bilateral trainings and seminars in the context of this partnership have taken place throughout 2017 – for example, the 31st CBRN Regiment in Liberec has trained for one week in June with the Nebraska National Guard,⁴⁹ and the 7th Mechanised Brigade has trained with the Texas National Guard in August.⁵⁰ Similarly, the IMET programme (International Military Education & Training) remains an effective co-operation platform between the US and the Czech Army that is designed to expose Czech defence personnel to US military training and doctrine, build capacities, increase the professionalisation of forces and promote democratic values. IMET is overseen by the US Embassy in Prague and for 2017 it had a requested budget of USD 1.8 million.⁵¹ On the other hand, the Czech access to Foreign Military Financing (an instrument of the State Department that provides grant assistance for the acquisition of US defence equipment, services, and training) has been steadily declining⁵² and 2017 saw no budget request for the Czech Republic in connection with it.⁵³

In terms of defence procurement, the US State Department has agreed in October 2017 to a sale of twelve Bell UH-1Y helicopters to the Czech Republic – but this acquisition is to be decided upon by the new Czech government formed after the October elections.⁵⁴

The two countries' co-operation in the field of security has not been hampered by the transition year and, from a broader perspective, was marked by the Czech anticipation to hear an explicit commitment to NATO and its Article 5 from the US President. Concurrently, the Czech defence authorities have been preoccupied with the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework, which aims to deepen the defence co-operation amongst EU Member States, jointly develop defence capabilities and enhance the EU's capacity as an international security partner.⁵⁵ PESCO's role will thus need to be harmonised with that of NATO, so that the two frameworks can operate in tandem and not past each other. Some US policymakers have, in fact, voiced concern that PESCO may threaten NATO cohesiveness.⁵⁶ Others see it as a reaction to Donald Trump's initial reluctance to reassure NATO allies of the full US commitment to the decades-old partnership.⁵⁷

Economy

The bilateral trade between the Czech Republic and the US in the last decade has seen steady increases in both imports and exports of goods, with the balance slightly favouring the Czech Republic. The year 2017 saw a significant increase in imports from the US and a slower rise in Czech exports, thereby creating a trade deficit for the Czech Republic. The major increase in imports from the US was in machinery and transport equipment. The Czech exports also saw an increase in machinery and transport equipment, but also in chemicals and firearms. Overall, the composition of the

Czech exports – when compared to the situation ten years ago – is increasingly made up of high added value products. In 2017 imports from the US accounted for 2.5% of all imports to the Czech Republic (compared to 2.1% in 2009), and exports to the US accounted for 2.1% of all Czech exports (compared to 1.6% in 2009).

Figure 1:
The Czech Republic-United States Bilateral Trade⁵⁸

(in millions of USD)	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Imports from the US	2,200	2,831	2,965	3,033	3,120	3,743	3,318	3,299	3,990
Exports to the US	1,805	2,322	3,156	3,581	3,533	3,908	3,740	3,540	3,763
Balance	- 394	- 509	191	548	413	164	422	241	- 227

Source: Czech Statistical Office.

The election of Donald Trump, however, has raised questions as to the future US approach to transatlantic trade and Washington's support for the liberal trading order in general. Throughout his campaign, Trump has been critical of past and present multilateral trade agreements in which the US has been taking part and argued that the free trading system no longer benefits the US economy and US workers as it used to. He partly confirmed his intentions of remodelling the trade architecture in which the US was embedded by abandoning the Trans-Pacific Partnership⁵⁹ (TPP) on his first full day in office and initiating the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).⁶⁰ In a similar vein, Trump claimed to oppose the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

TTIP was the Atlantic counterpart of TPP and both free trade agreements were deemed to be the *gold standard* for 21st century multilateral trade arrangements.⁶¹ TTIP, in particular, was also supposed to strengthen – geopolitically – the transatlantic partnership.⁶² Yet, due to Trump's suspicion of complex trade deals the TTIP negotiations have been in limbo throughout 2017 and the administration has been unclear about its willingness to resume the talks. While the US president has not been explicit on the issue, his Commerce Secretary suggested that the US remains open to a trade deal with the EU.⁶³ It thereby seems likely that a possible deal will be sought, albeit with a different name and scope. While some groups in the EU have welcomed the US reluctance to join TTIP, the Czech government has been proactive and pushing for the continuation of the talks.⁶⁴

As mentioned, the Economic and Commercial Dialogue between the Czech Republic and the US did not take place in 2017, but other activities aimed at strengthening the trade relationship were implemented. For example, the post of a science diplomat at the Czech Embassy in Washington, D.C. has been created to foster and develop strategic ties between Czech and American research institutions.⁶⁵ The aim is to bring together top institutions for excellent research – like in the co-operation between the

Research Centre Řež and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory on the development of small nuclear reactors.⁶⁶

Trade partnerships and opportunities are also sought on the level of Czech regions and US states – for instance, the region of South Moravia is looking to sign a memorandum with the state of Georgia in 2018 to facilitate their trade and investment co-operation and has been active in exchanging delegations and presenting mutual investment opportunities to local businesses.⁶⁷ Similarly, the US Embassy in the Czech Republic, along with the Czech Business Chamber and the Czech Ministry of Trade and Industry, has organised a seminar titled *Doing Business in the USA: Focus State: Texas*, which was attended by nearly fifty companies and where Czech business representatives were invited to take part in the annual *Select USA Summit*.⁶⁸

An increased emphasis on economic diplomacy, the strengthening of the economic team at the Czech Embassy in Washington and the supporting role of CzechInvest and the Czech Export Bank in recent years have been positive factors in expanding the Czech-US trade relations. CzechInvest has been supporting Czech start-ups in the US through the CzechAccelerator and CzechDemo programmes, and in 2017, with the support of the Czech Consulate General in New York, it opened a Czech Pavilion at the TechCrunch Disrupt NY 2017 Conference, where Czech startups presented their innovative products to potential investors.⁶⁹

A field that is seeing outstanding expansion in terms of bilateral trade is aviation. As the US company GE Aviation was choosing in 2017 the location for its new plant in Central Bohemia for the construction of the unique Advanced Turboprop engines, which will be constructed with the co-operation of experts from ČVUT,⁷⁰ the Czech company Aircraft Industries was tapping American markets with its model L410 NG, which was then undergoing certification in the US.⁷¹

MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPACE

The year 2018 is an important point in the history of Czech-American relations as it marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the formal bilateral ties of the two countries. For the purposes of celebrating this centennial, throughout the year 2017 the Czech MFA and the US Embassy in Prague have been planning commemorative events that are to take place throughout 2018.⁷² The programme of the centennial commemoration has been high on the agenda of the US Embassy, and its coordination with the MFA in regard to it bridged the transition year of 2017.⁷³ However, it remains to be seen how other programmes of US public diplomacy will be carried out in the coming years as the State Department's budget has been cut significantly for the fiscal year 2018 – which will most likely affect diplomacy and foreign assistance.⁷⁴

Another issue high on the agenda within the Czech-American relations in 2017 was the case of the suspected Russian hacker Yevgeniy Nikulin. Nikulin was apprehended by the Czech Police in late 2016, and after authorities rejected his request for asylum, the case quickly turned into a clash between Washington and Moscow as to

where the Russian citizen should be tried. The claim for his extradition to the US was made on the basis of the *Treaty on Extradition between the United States of America and the Czech Republic*.⁷⁵ While Nikulin was accused in the US on nine counts, including conspiracy, trafficking, computer intrusion and identity theft by compromising the personal information of more than a hundred million users of the American technology companies Dropbox, LinkedIn, Formspring and Google,⁷⁶ Russia sought Nikulin on separate, less severe and older charges.⁷⁷

Although the Czech courts have decided that Nikulin would be extradited (and thus not tried in the Czech Republic), the decision about where he would be extradited was not taken in 2017.⁷⁸ This was perhaps due to domestic politics and the disagreements between the Cabinet and the President – while the Minister of Justice Robert Pelikán (who has the legal authority to decide on the extradition) was allegedly inclined to extradite Nikulin to the United States, the President Miloš Zeman has purportedly lobbied for his extradition to Russia.⁷⁹

In terms of extending bilateral co-operation in various spheres, the Czech Republic is also working with US partners in the field of international development. In 2017, the Czech Development Agency has signed a memorandum of understanding with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for the implementation of activities focussed on informing local farmers in Georgia about phytosanitary requirements and their compliance with such measures. USAID is co-financing the project from the *Emerging Donors Challenge Fund*.⁸⁰

With respect to the media representation and public images of the United States and the US-Czech relations, it must be noted that these have been significantly influenced by the increasing fragmentation of the Czech media landscape. The creation of dozens, if not hundreds, of low-budget fringe internet media has increased the accessibility of conspiratorial interpretations of current world affairs to Czech citizens. One of the targets of such media is the Czech membership in supranational organisations. *Alternative* news reports – which often attack the Czech membership in NATO,⁸¹ report on the demerits of liberal democracy⁸² and have nostalgic undertones of communism⁸³ – often become viral amongst certain groups of Czech society. Combined with Donald Trump's ambivalence about the transatlantic relationship in general, recent polls have shown a significant drop in the Czechs' approval of the "job performance of the leadership of the United States", which in 2017 stood at 38% – down from 49% in 2016.⁸⁴

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a simplified conclusion we can say that the Czech foreign policy towards the United States in 2017 was characterised by a process of getting acquainted with the new administration and trying to navigate its positions on foreign affairs. During this process, with regard to the proclaimed priorities of the new administration, the Czech Republic has been applying a proactive and co-operative approach (agreeing to increase its

defence budget, strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank, increasing its engagement in Middle Eastern conflicts) combined with a reactive and offensive approach. The reactivity of the Czech foreign policy toward the US can be observed in the realm of Czech support for multilateralism, since the new administration seems to be more inclined toward bilateral trade agreements⁸⁵ (thus stalling the TTIP negotiations) and holds negative views of the multilateral deals negotiated by the previous administration, such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the *Iran Nuclear Deal*) and the Paris Climate Change Agreement (COP21). In all these instances, the Czech side has expressed concern over the US withdrawal (or possible withdrawal) from the given multilateral framework – such as when the Czech Minister of Environment Erich Brabec proclaimed that COP21 cannot be renegotiated (as the Trump administration demanded).⁸⁶

The EU's insistence on maintaining the United States within multilateral commitments of all kinds is nothing surprising and has been persistent throughout the last decades, so it cannot be considered a novel response to the initial steps of the new administration. Similarly, the US reluctance toward multilateral frameworks is a cyclical policy that was applied during the Reagan administration and more recently during the George W. Bush presidency, when the administration pulled out of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change and the International Criminal Court.⁸⁷ In this sense, the United States seems to be the *Gulliver* whose power the Europeans would best like to see *tied down* through multilateral arrangements and unleashed only in times of need. It thus seems that the Czech Republic has to some extent adopted the logic guiding the EU's approach to the US role in global affairs.

Taking stock of the above-mentioned information, some broader guiding principles for the Czech policy toward the United States can be derived. First, as there is political consensus that the Czech economy should gradually move up the global value chains, the United States should be the primary focus of the country's economic diplomacy. Secondly, Donald Trump's questioning of some aspects of NATO cannot be considered as a mere historical aberration, and the likelihood that future US presidents will hold similar positions is not negligible. Therefore, the Czech side should welcome the development of PESCO, which in the (extreme) case of a future US decommitment from NATO could serve as an alternative defence framework for Czech security. At the same time, the Czech Republic should insist on PESCO's complementarity with NATO. Lastly, from the perspective of a small state multilateralism is a preferential form of interstate co-operation as it binds the powerful and the weaker actors to the same set of rules and norms (at least in theory, if sometimes not in practice). It is thus in the interest of the Czech Republic to uphold multilateralism in international affairs and voice concern over the new administration's steps aimed at pulling the US out of global multilateral frameworks.

Endnotes

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