
Conclusion

Whither the Czech Foreign Policy?

MORE CONSISTENCY AND PROACTIVITY

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As has been the trend in recent years, the Czech foreign policy in 2017 was characterised primarily as reactive rather than proactive. The eighteen chapters in this edition offered informed analyses on the current state of and recommendations for the Czech foreign policy in connection with the respective agendas. It became clear that all the authors wished the Czech foreign policy decision makers encouraged the Czech Republic's participation in multilateral frameworks. The Czech Republic, being a medium-sized European country and a small country in a global context, set out to be active in multilateral structures because with its limited human resources and funding, these environments provide good opportunities for it to voice its priorities and possibly become an agenda setter rather than an agenda taker in a greater number of areas.

On the European level, the Czech Republic primarily opts for reactive behavior as articulated by the EU institutions. An EU issue that gained prominence in the Czech European agenda in 2017 related to the screening of foreign direct investments (FDIs). In September, the Commission published a package containing European framework for screening of FDIs incoming into the EU. The proposal stemmed from the activity of Germany, France and Italy who wished to strengthen the EU's resilience towards potentially harmful foreign investments for EU interests, such as those focused on strategic assets allowing to control or influence European undertakings important for law and order, critical infrastructure or dealings with sensitive information. Reviewed by Kovář and Sychra, most of the main Czech actors of EU policy welcomed the proposal. On behalf of the Czech government, Minister of Industry and Trade Jiří Havlíček supported the proposal in particular given that such mechanism currently does not exist in the Czech Republic except for the screening of investments into the banking system conducted by the Czech National Bank. The State Secretary for EU Affairs Aleš Chmelař pointed out that the Czech Republic supported activities to identify potential security risks and welcomed the European framework as an '*instrument allowing identifying such risks*'.

Nevertheless, Kovář and Sychra argued that in 2017, Prague was proactive in relation to discussions on double foodstuff quality in tandem with the other V4 countries. This joint offensive by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia led to an EU-wide acknowledgement of this double standard in the European Union. Further,

the Czech Republic supported the recast of the directive related to unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market, which went against the EU Commissions' view, which was in favour of preserving the existing legislation.

Another example of a joint V4 offensive within the EU was connected with the proposed amendment to the Dublin III Regulation related to the migration and refugee crisis – namely the emergency and permanent relocation mechanisms, which the four Central European countries found non-functional. Dostál suggested that in instances of such sensitive issues as migration, the Czechs could play a positive role and be mediators who would bridge the gap between Brussels and the so-called 'European irritants' from the Central European area. This, however, requires much more political investment, yet the benefits would be worthwhile for the Central European countries since their image would be improved because they would be perceived as being more predictable and upholding democratic values and humanitarian principles.

Three contributors to this yearbook focussed on the three main partnerships with Western European countries: those with Germany, France and the United Kingdom. As was traditionally the case, in 2017, the relations with Germany played the most important role. However, both Germany and the Czech Republic focussed on their respective parliamentary elections and the preceding campaigns of individual parties during the year; for this reason, there was a visible decline in high profile visits between the two countries. Nevertheless, Urbanovská stressed that the practically oriented co-operation between them on a lower sectoral level continued and they were more engaged in defence on both a bilateral and a multilateral level, as they co-operated on defence in the context of NATO, the EU and the United Nations. As for the Czech Republic building closer partnerships with the bordering federal states of Bavaria and Saxony, this should continue since it contributes to improving the relations in matters that some still view as outstanding (e.g. the Sudeten-German issue).

Tomalová (France) and Brusenbauch Meislová (the UK) highlighted the importance of having a long-term political vision in the Czech relations with France and the post-Brexit UK. These partnerships were primarily void of politicisation or polarisation in 2017. In the future, the Czech foreign policy makers will need to apply increasingly different approaches to these bilateral relations due to the two countries' different roles in Europe. With France under President Macron, there is an impulse to engage in a more vibrant discussion about deeper integration of the EU. On the other hand, the UK leadership has been focussing on the process of withdrawal from the EU and this greatly affects any initiatives put forward that would reinvigorate the Czech-British bilateral ties.

The Czech Republic will have to further shape its responses in the security and defence sphere since all three of the major Western powers keep suggesting different approaches to European defence. Dyčka argued that in 2017, the Czechs were mostly reactive: they were *reactive offensive* in their resistance against the Russian threat to their NATO allies and *reactive co-operative* in relation to the US pressure to increase defence expenditures. In the context of the European defence, however, there is a major discussion about several different proposals linked to NATO, PESCO and the European Intervention Initiative. With limited funding and capabilities, the

Czechs should be proactive in insisting on complementarity with NATO vis-à-vis all additional proposals.

Dyčka, Hornát and the authors of the chapter on the Middle East and the Maghreb (Čejka, Daniel and Lubin) agreed that the Czech Republic was proactive in supporting missions in the Middle East by sending humanitarian relief, specialists, pilots and/or military policemen there. Constructive military diplomacy in today's era of unpredictability, such as that in the Middle East, is vital, and this became particularly clear during the transition period from the previous US administration to the current one. This is also a good opportunity to keep engaging the US in multilateral co-operations. As stated by Hornát, the US reluctance toward multilateralism was not a new development – it comes and goes in waves – but for a country of the size and influence of the Czech Republic, it is by far more beneficial to see the world leader more involved in co-operative frameworks rather than to see it acting as an isolationist.

Čejka, Daniel and Lubin pointed out that the Czech diplomacy was good at fulfilling the modest goals of contributing to the stabilisation of the Middle East, yet more attention had to be paid to maintaining a balanced position in specific relations in the region. While this approach might place the Czech Republic against some key partners in Europe and globally, it can shape the country into an 'honest' broker in some matters rather than a one-sided supporter of a single country.

Avoiding double-standards was also recommended by the authors analysing the Balkans and Turkey. Dopita, Heller and Tamchynová believe that if we want to have a meaningful and constructive policy in this region, it should be a policy with more consistency, less internal fragmentation and no double-tracking. This often comes down to active resistance or statements of specific foreign policy actors, which makes the efforts of the MFA harder when it needs to raise issues of human rights or mediate cases with foreign countries.

The Asia-Pacific chapter also suggested aiming for a more balanced approach in dealings with specific nations. Its authors argue that the politicised and polarised domestic and foreign policy toward China is counterproductive and not representative of the real circumstances. Fürst noted that the securitised narrative of it was often based on emotions but it still came to dominate the mainstream media, while the positive bias in regard to it coming from some representatives, which emphasised the economic impact of Chinese investments, had a tendency to be overstated. Meanwhile, Kožíšek highlighted the proactive and co-operative nature of the Czech foreign policy towards Japan and the Republic of Korea; however, he argues that defining and specifying the long-term goals is necessary in this case.

In some parts of the world, there was still an unfulfilled potential in terms of the Czech foreign policy in 2017. Kizeková assessed the relations with Central, South, and Southeast Asia and the South Pacific (Australia and New Zealand), and found that in all these cases, the knowledge of common practices was crucial. For all these selected regions, she recommended a greater engagement of the Czech expatriate communities, which could facilitate a better understanding of the local customs and the creation of constructive networks.

The Czech foreign policy is often carried out through economic diplomacy. This is certainly the case with Latin America (Hrabálek) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Ženková Rudincová). The contributors writing about them concluded that these particular regions are not politicised or polarised. Nevertheless, if they are to be more sustainable, they require more depth. Additionally, the Czech foreign policy should support the trade initiatives between the EU and the relevant regional co-operative structures, such as MERCOSUR or the African Union, since they provide a greater impetus for the related activities, especially when the countries are geographically very distant.

Zemanová and Machoň concluded that the Czech external economic relations in 2017 were successful and they attributed this outcome to the supportive domestic climate and favourable external conditions. They warned, however, that should reforms in this area take place in the future, they must be problem-oriented and eliminate the remaining shortcomings. They should not be linked to political power struggles, or opinion streams of interest groups. In relation to the danger of forging non-standard *special relations* while promoting Czech business interests, Kratochvíl and Svoboda informed about such discrepancies when discussing the Czech ties with Russia. Their main concern was that such links might be problematic as they provide an unfair advantage and are unethical. They also lead to some visible neglect of other aspects of diplomacy, such as cultural co-operation, research co-operation, education or the environment.

Human rights and development are two particular spheres that were reportedly unnoticed or overshadowed in Czech foreign policy in 2017. Bílková attributed this situation to internal politics, the governmental crisis before the summer, the parliamentary elections and the following debates about the new government. There was also no consensus on the human rights foreign policy among political parties. As a solution, she encouraged the decision makers to embrace a broader definition of human rights, and revisit the priorities from the 2015 Concept documents related to human rights and transition promotion policy. A similar conclusion came from Werner, who acknowledged that the right framework and strategies were in place, but the political scene did not show much interest in his view. He suggested a gradual introduction of a more business-oriented model of development co-operation. Nevertheless, as stated by Svoboda, the Czech Republic pursued a strategy of emphasising both economic and development programmes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, which shows signs of pragmatism and sharing the values of democracy and human rights.

Tichý noted that the Czech government was relatively successful in maintaining a unified position in its energy policies and was able to apply a proactive and co-operative position bilaterally but also on the EU level in relation to supporting a higher share of nuclear energy. In line with his recommendations, the Czech Republic should aim for more diversification in its gas connections, while maintaining the supply from the Ukrainian gas transit.

After reading the eighteen chapters, one senses a disconnect between the strategic documents and the actions of the actors in charge of the Czech foreign policy in 2017. Although internally, some statements or activities, which are often linked to President Zeman, might be brushed off, they get a great amount of media coverage

and often overshadow the positive aspects that the Czech Republic brings to international fora. Russia stands out as a primary example of such fragmentation, with the President holding an openly pro-Kremlin position, while the diplomatic circles and the government stressed the Czech commitment to the common EU position. As such, one should not be surprised if there is an incorrect reading of and/or confusion about some aspects of Czech foreign policy.

One important part of forging good relations is having a positive image and a good reputation. However, Peterková and Tomalová found in their research that there is a limited political support and lacking long-term vision in the sphere of Czech public diplomacy. Naturally, this comes down to limited funding and personnel. Nevertheless, this dimension should become more prominent in the future, as it provides a great opportunity to inform about the Czech culture, is tied to sports diplomacy and solidifies the ties with the Czech expatriate communities around the world.

It is our sincere hope that this volume of the *Czech Foreign Policy* series (*Czech Foreign Policy in 2017: Analysis*) provided some valuable observations and recommendations for the future. We welcome any ongoing discussion about the topics included here, as well as those that did not make it into this particular publication but still relate to the Czech foreign policy.

Endnotes

- ¹ ČTK (2017). Senát podpořil prověřování zahraničních investic [Senat supported screening of foreign investments]. *ČeskéNoviny.cz*. Available at: <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/senat-podporil-proverovani-zahranicnich-investic/1559277> (Accessed: 15 March 2018).
- ² Český rozhlas (2017). Přísnější pravidla pro zahraniční investice v EU? „Obavy vzbuzují některé investice z Číny a Ruska,“ říká Václav Hampl [Stricter rules for foreign investments in the EU? ‘Concerns raised by some investments from China and Russia,’ Vaclav Hampl says]. Available at: http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/dvacetminut/_zprava/prisnejsi-pravidla-pro-zahranicni-investice-v-eu-obavy-vzbuzuji-nektere-investice-z-ciny-a-ruska-rika-vaclav-hampl--1771377 (Accessed: 15 March 2018).