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The Institute of International Relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic organised the **8th International Symposium “Czech Foreign Policy”**. The conference was held on 21st and 22nd September, 2016 in the Czernin Palace of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in Prague. This year, the main topic of the discussions was **the Strategy in Foreign Policy**.

Opening Address and Discussion: Why Is Our World So Troubled in 2016?

Following the opening remarks by **Petr Kratochvíl**, the Director of the Institute of International Relations, and **Michal Kořan**, the Manager of the Symposium and a Researcher at the Institute of International Relations, **Charles Gati**, a Senior Research Professor of European and Eurasian Studies at Johns Hopkins University, commenced his speech with a reference to his visit to Czechoslovakia in 1991, during which he had his first opportunity to visit the Czernin Palace due to an invitation from Jiří Dienstbier, Sr., the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic at that time. According to Professor Gati, the major events which trouble the contemporary world include the actions of ISIS in the Middle East, the war in Syria, the refugee crisis, a weakening of European integration, Russian aggression, China’s increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea, the North Korean nuclear program and the inability of the political system of the U.S to effectively produce legislation. Furthermore, the simultaneous occurrence of these events increases their severity and global instability as a whole.

Professor Gati argued that there are five major causes of those events. The first factor is the negative direction of U.S politics, which is patently clear in the presidential campaign and the opinions of Donald Trump and his supporters. Secondly, there is the weakening of the global influence of the U.S, whose position has been increasingly challenged by both Russia and China. The third key factor which has contributed to the troubles of the current world is the revival of nationalism and the glorification of the nation-state. Nationalism, in contrast to



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patriotism, considers other nations than one's own to be inferior, thus reducing the potential of international cooperation. This has, in turn, contributed to the rise of emotional politics, which is noticeable worldwide, with Russian foreign policy for example being increasingly driven by emotions, particularly by a longstanding feeling of humiliation as a result of Russia's post-Cold War decline. The war in Syria is another example of an emotionally driven conflict. Finally, new technologies, particularly the Internet, have had a negative impact as well. The Internet is a medium that has provided its users with a myriad of opportunities to express their aggressive and violent attitudes, thus contributing to increased hostility and violence in the current world. At the end of the address, however, Professor Gati expressed his belief in a brighter future, which would particularly include the continuation of European integration as well as positive developments in the aforementioned areas.

After the Bratislava Summit: the State of the Political Dialogue on Europe

The panel discussion concerning the September 16th Bratislava Summit concluded that the results were successful, albeit predictable. The panel discussion featured **Piotr Buras**, Head of the Warsaw office of the European Council on Foreign Relations, **Isabell Hoffmann**, Project Manager at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, **David Král**, Director of the Policy Planning Department at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, **Zsuzsanna Végh**, Research Fellow, at the Center for European Neighborhood Studies at the Central European University. The panel was chaired by **Benjamin Tallis** a Research Fellow and Editor in Chief of *New Perspectives* from the Institute of International Relations Prague.

One of the most prominent issues over the course of the panel discussion concerned how the existing models of democracy are increasingly under pressure from a variety of threats. It was thus considered vital that the current narrative of the EU is rewritten in order to guarantee future success. In order to do so economic and political differences within the EU need to be addressed and not simply ignored in order to avoid problems arising in the future. It was therefore imperative that politicians exercise their prerogatives and not simply cover in



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the face of populism. Although politicians in the United Kingdom may have done so, it was still considered necessary that the country be given a breathing space in order to consider its future and thus mitigate unnecessary economic and political damage.

A second issue discussed within the panel was the need for the Czech Republic to strengthen its national identity. Although the Czech Republic is committed to further European integration, its Visegrad Group partners, Poland and Hungary, are sceptical. As a result of Hungary's opposition to further cooperation, particularly over the migration crisis, it was viewed as the country which gained the least from the Bratislava Summit owing to its lack of interest in improving relations with Poland and Germany. It was made particularly clear that further European integration has increasingly led to growing concerns within Hungary over its future direction. Although efforts have been made by various EU bodies and member-states to combat the rising problems of nationalism and discontent with European integration, it was made clear that a lack of a credible and effective strategic plan have hindered these efforts. Until a concrete plan is developed the economic and political gaps between European member-states will serve as significant barriers to further cooperation. While the Bratislava Summit did attempt to address this issue, owing to a great number of disagreements, it is still unclear as to what the future holds for the EU. The panel concluded with a brief discussion on the need to establish a more effective strategy for handling the Syrian refugee crisis and the possibility of a European army. Although the latter idea was highlighted as a significant one it was agreed that its establishment in the near future is unlikely.

EU Defence and Security: The Scope for the Regional Cooperation

The panel discussion on EU Defence and Security could not have occurred at a more timely moment, due to it coinciding with the defence-related announcements at the Bratislava Summit. The EU Defence and Security panel was centred around the discussions of **Milan Nič**, Research Director at the GLOBSEC Policy Institute, **Tomáš Szunyog**, Director of



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Security at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, **Paweł Ukielski**, from the Institute of Political Studies Polish Academy of Sciences and finally **Tomáš Weiss**, Head of Department of European Studies at Charles University.

Although the opening remarks by the panellists largely dealt with the close security relationships the Visegrad Group countries have with each other, as well as with Germany, the discussion swiftly turned to the need for further initiatives such as regional defence procurement and joint-military formations. The development of regional procurement strategies for platforms such as military helicopters was highlighted as an effective way to reduce the financial burden of defence and stimulate the European defence industry.

The task of strengthening regional cooperation between the Visegrad Group and Germany within the field of defence and security, while a difficult one, is likely to be influenced by several positive factors, including the likely loss of a British veto on proposals such as the proposal for a European army, and the gradual disengagement of the United States from Europe. These factors, together with the perceived threat from a resurgent Russia, and the strong display of unity after the Warsaw Summit of NATO in July 2016, have also strengthened the necessity of coordinating regional defence. However, in spite of the clamour for greater regional engagement, the different strategic cultures of Poland and Germany, Visegrad-German tensions over the migration crisis, and the possible loss of national sovereignty were identified as threats to further defence integration. The combination of these factors and the upcoming 2017 German elections will consequently serve as significant obstacles for the emergence of a common European framework on defence. Nevertheless, the planned greater regional cooperation on defence and security issues between the Visegrad Group and Germany was perceived in a cautious, but optimistic light, and is likely to remain an issue of high significance for the foreseeable future.



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Germany, Visegrad and the Future of the EU Economy and Economic Governance

The panel discussion concerning the future of the EU economy and economic governance presented three disparate views of what steps should be taken by the EU and other leading European powers. **Matthias Schäfer**, Head of the Economic Policy team at the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, was the first to speak, listing four ideas central to the bustling German economy, raising the question as to whether similar methods could be implemented elsewhere. He emphasised the importance of sound public finance, a competitive economy predominately made up by small companies, the role of open markets, and finding an answer to how everyone can profit from the fruits of the economic system. **Zoltán Pogatsa**, a Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics, University of Western Hungary, spoke next; emphatically arguing that austerity has diminished demand within the European economy and is not the key to success. He argued like Matthias, that sound public finance is vital. Finally, **Zdeněk Kudrna** a Researcher at the Salzburg Centre of European Union Studies stated that while the Czech Republic is economically dependent on Germany, it is vital that European economies do not lose their competitiveness with Germany. Under the current circumstances, the Visegrad countries in particular should not simply mimic the roots of Germany's economic structure, and it is in their hands to create their own successful models. Establishing relations with Asian economics and Russia are not necessarily bad ideas, but the Visegrad Group should strive to strengthen their domestic economies and trade relations whilst at the same time maintaining healthy European economic relationships.

The Czech-Polish Strategic Relationship

The first breakout session pertained to the question of the Czech-Polish strategic relationship. The panel featured **Vít Dostál**, the Director of the Research Center of the Association for International Affairs in Prague; **Jakub Groszkowski**, the Head of the Central European



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Department at the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw; and **Michal Šimečka**, a Researcher at the Institute of International Relations Prague. The discussion was chaired by **Benjamin Tallis**, a Researcher and the Editor-in-Chief of *New Perspectives* at the Institute of International Relations Prague.

While Dostál and Šimečka focused predominantly on the problems of the Czech-Polish relations and the two countries' competing visions of Europe, Groszkowski highlighted more positive aspects of the relationship. Nevertheless, the panel agreed that 2010 could be seen as a breaking point in the Czech-Polish relations. For instance, Šimečka argued that while the Czech-Polish relationship did not undergo significant changes on the surface, with the related meetings still taking place every spring, the priorities of the two countries have changed, particularly with the change of the Polish government in 2015. Focusing on the last ten years of the relationship, Dostál asserted that cooperation between the two countries has been less visible since 2010. He highlighted certain asymmetries between Poland and the Czech Republic, such as the existence of strong political personalities in Poland between 2007 and 2015 (Prime Minister Tusk and foreign minister Sikorski), and the lack of such strong personalities in the Czech Republic, or the fact that the Czech Republic does not perceive Russia as a threat as much as Poland does. Nevertheless, according to Dostál, the Czech-Polish axis of cooperation is the strongest within the Visegrad Four.

Another recurring theme in the discussion was the issue of divergent, if not competing, visions of Europe and European cooperation. In Šimečka's view, the biggest problem of the relationship does not lie in policies such as energy or security policy, on which the two countries cooperate without substantial issues, but in their different underlying visions of Europe, particularly Central and Eastern Europe and the Visegrad Group. While the vision of the Czech Republic lies in a stronger and more integrated Central Europe, including Germany and Austria, Poland views Central Europe and the Visegrad Group as a counterbalance to Germany, and the EU as an obstruction to sovereign nation states. This point raised a



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discussion about a potential strategic triangle between Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany, which, however, does not appear to be a realistic scenario.

In contrast, Jakub Groszkowski emphasised the areas of cooperation of the Czech Republic and Poland, highlighting five core interests: export, the Schengen Area and the single market as the main achievements of the EU, the focus on modernising their economies and on the issue of the middle-income gap, modernisation of the energy sector, but not at a rate that would harm economic competitiveness, and a stable neighbourhood in the east and south of Europe. These interests directly translate into policies, such as the support of the Balkan states in migration issues, the promotion of the visa liberalisation process with Ukraine, the on-going rejection of the Eurozone, or lobbying for a stronger EU cohesion policy after 2020. By asserting that today we are witnessing a Visegradisation of Czech-Polish relations, meaning that the cooperation is less ambitious and more focused on the Visegrad Group than on Europe as a whole, Groszkowski set the ground for a fruitful discussion with the audience.

Czech Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times Part II

The second half of the discussion on Czech Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times highlighted the growing need for a reassessment of Czech foreign policy. More concretely, it was made clear that the Czech Republic should do more to develop its existing strategic partnerships, strengthen its relations with China, and consolidate its relations with its V4 partners. According to **Michal Šimečka** the use of strategic partnerships by the Czech Government could help the Czech Republic develop a stronger identity on the global stage. Such partnerships, provided they are coordinated, comprehensive, and serve a common purpose, would enable the Czech Government to create clear priorities and deepen existing bi-lateral relationships. Although current strategic partnerships with countries such as Germany, the United States, France and Poland are of importance on both economic and security grounds, care should be taken when selecting partners who do not share common interests. It was also



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stressed that the Czech Republic should consider developing a strategic partnership with one of the Western Balkan countries, where it would be the senior partner. The construction of such a partnership would reinforce the idea that the Czech Republic is an independent and flexible global actor.

Although the formal announcement of a strategic partnership between China and the Czech Republic in March 2016 is not one where the Czech Republic can be identified as the senior partner, it has undoubtedly served to bolster the already cordial ties between the two countries. Such an announcement, according to **Rudolf Fürst**, researcher at the Institute of International Relations, is a natural development, although it comes at a time when China is actively expanding its diplomatic activity in Eastern and Central Europe. This rapid spate of activity, which has led to the establishment of the 16+1 Framework, consisting of China and 16 Eastern European states, forms part of China's wider engagement with Europe as part of its One Belt, One Road project. The One Belt, One Road, an ambitious plan to link Europe and China via a series of extensive rail, road, and maritime infrastructure projects would transit Eastern Europe and potentially provide substantial commercial benefits for the region. Although the Czech Republic is not yet part of this project, the shift by the Czech Government towards a Czech-Chinese relationship based on pragmatism, which overlooks the human rights record of China, has undoubtedly led to the bi-lateral relationship being regarded with cautious optimism.

Despite the growing significance of the Czech-Chinese relations, the Czech Republic's ties with its Visegrad partners are of far greater importance. Although **Michal Kořan** stressed the vital nature of the Visegrad Group as a platform for Czech foreign policy it is clear that a number of problems cloud the Visegrad Group's normally robust and cooperative multilateral relations. One issue of particular concern is the use of the Visegrad Group as a vehicle to project the views and policies of national leaders of the Visegrad Group. Secondly, the lack of a clear strategic narrative from the Visegrad Group has led to the group being perceived by other European partners as an anti-Brussels regional pressure group. In spite of the Czech Republic's efforts to moderate the Visegrad Group's dialogue it has not always been



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successful on this front. It was consequently recommended that the Czech Republic should strive to rebuild and emphasise the noteworthy features of the Visegrad Group, and initiate a European dialogue on political legitimacy, and that it should do so before a serious rift develops between the Visegrad Group members and the rest of the European Union.

Partners of the Conference



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