

## **The 12th International Symposium on the Czech Foreign Policy: Building Sustainable Connections**

**8th October 2020**

### **Conference Report**

The 12th International Symposium on the Czech Foreign Policy: Building Sustainable Connections, organised by the Institute of International Relations Prague, explored connectivity and building sustainable connections in various spheres to bring about more lasting solutions, especially through strengthening the collaboration of like-minded democratic nations seeking a rule-based world order. The panels focused on topics related to sustainable development goals, mainly support of human rights and stronger institutions (democracy, good governance, and rule of law), gender equality (and women's empowerment), the environment, energy, the efficiency of foreign aid, cyber security, propaganda and coalition-building. The speakers discussed how to navigate within the complex post-COVID-19 environment and what roles there are for various stakeholders. The 12th Symposium was conducted through an online platform and streamed on the Internet.

#### **9:00 – 9:25 Opening Remarks**

The opening remarks of the event were delivered by Tomáš Petříček, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The Minister congratulated the organizers for running the symposium despite the ongoing pandemic, and he characterized the event as “well-established in the calendar of foreign affairs”. The annual symposium is a place, whether physical or digital, for academics and experts to meet and discuss current topics. He continued by referring to this year's overarching theme, *Building Sustainable Connections*, as relevant in light of the current global situation. With the restrictions enforced and the lockdowns that occurred, connectivity through modern technological means has proven to be of utmost importance for staying in touch as a society, continuing our work and continuing with diplomacy. Minister Petříček then explained the need to build sustainable connections and use the available technology to ensure that the unprecedented situation of the pandemic crisis does not stand as a barrier in fulfilling the agenda goals set for 2020 in the field of international relations. Since connectivity is well-linked with sustainable development, it should be seen as part of the solution and not as part of the problem. Lastly, the Minister expressed his wish for a fruitful outcome of the Symposium's debates and discussions, as they make a great contribution to the work of policy makers and the ministry.

Following Minister Petříček, Dr. Ondřej Ditych, the Director of the Institute of International Relations Prague (IIR), greeted all the attendants and proceeded by highlighting the contributions of modern technology in running the event since it could not be held in the Černín Palace venue as was customary in the previous years. The IIR used the opportunity of the annual event to showcase its policy research in the areas of European politics, security, the environment, energy and sustainable development. The IIR researchers were joined by colleagues from academia and think tanks, diplomatic services, NGOs and, lastly, the public. According to Dr Ditych, it is a vital interest of the Czech Republic that connections of all scales in politics are preserved along with humanity in this unprecedented situation. He said we should have in mind the fundamental human rights but also the environment in view of the inevitable changes in the way our societies are organized, and, last, but not least, global social justice and fair sharing of resources and products of labour. Finally, the Director expressed his hope of the conference being a contribution, whether minor or major, to this restoration.

To conclude the opening remarks, the coordinator, Dr Kizeková, explained the reason behind the selection of the key theme, which was to find solutions in a more multi-spectral way through multilateral collaborations and alliances in the international community. She said the key question of the symposium is how to avoid quick solutions and go beyond physical connections while taking into consideration the preservation of human rights, democratic values, and the environmental consequences of our actions. The aim of this year's symposium was to define connectivity through different areas of expertise and explore ways to minimize interferences in affairs of states, which could, in some instances, undermine democratic values. She presented all the panels and debates that were to follow and thanked the experts and attendees for their time and interest in making this event happen. She pointed out that it was the first time in the history of the symposium that the keynote speeches were delivered by female experts. Furthermore, she thanked the NGOs and embassies for their valuable collaboration and their contributions to the symposium. And lastly, she thanked the IIR's conference staff and interns for their contributions.

### **9:35 – 10:20 Keynote Speeches and Debate**

The two keynote speeches of the 12<sup>th</sup> International Symposium represented a milestone, as it was the first time that the keynote speeches were by female speakers. Due to the travel restrictions imposed during the global pandemic, the streaming technology made it possible for the keynote debate to be conducted across three different countries and time zones: Dr Alica Kizeková, the program coordinator, was online from Australia, Professor Nancy Snow from Japan and Dr Françoise Nicolas from France.

Professor **Nancy Snow**, the first keynote speaker, presented her speech entitled “**Where do we go from here when we have to stay put? An up-close look at foreign policy and good governance practice in pandemic times**”. While adjusting the argument to this particular historical period, Professor Snow explored our dependency on government communication and public guidelines during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how our very existence relies on public officials and especially healthcare agencies such as Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, which we have become so intimate with that we now easily recognize the acronym CDC. The level of dependence on state institutions has changed our relationship with them.

A direct communication channel has become necessary to inform and protect citizens, which generated a bigger flux of information distribution, whilst the same channel also fomented the pre-existing manipulative state power. The already overcrowded global information space has reached a point in which it creates a flood of intel that is impossible to critically process. Inevitably we fell into the so-called “information war”, where the amount of trust in the information is more relevant than the veracity of it.

Professor Snow supported her claim by quoting Joseph Nye's concept of “soft power” from a text which was published in the journal *Foreign Policy* (1990) to introduce the paradox of plenty. The exposure of our brain to too much information our brain leads to a scarcity of attention, which allows the leading information sources to asymmetrically take advantage of this situation. What has made objective truth futile is that it was left with a determined credibility, given that people trust power more than the veracity of the source.

Although Professor Snow is an academic herself, she is very doubtful that we are going to be able to educate ourselves in critical thinking more in order to break the chain of scarcity of attention. Receiving education has become the core of society development; hence we use it towards “good and moral” purposes such as democracy. This can be observed by the strength of movements such as “Go Vote” that took over the US media before the 2020 presidential elections. However, if such an initiative is not followed by critical questioning of information we risk falling right into a manipulative net.

Education, as Snow affirmed, does not prevent people from being manipulated. Rather it makes them more vulnerable to propaganda campaigns. The reasons for such a statement are the following:

- A. Educated people tend to absorb information more easily and on a larger scale, which also counts for second hand and unverifiable information;
- B. Educated people are compelled to have an opinion about their surroundings, which makes them expose themselves to an outside influential power;
- C. Educated people consider themselves to be above the mass media's influence.

All this information is feverishly defended through those shared spaces that are used to expose our thoughts, as is the case with social media and mass media. Thus, this phenomenon enlarges the opposition of social spectrums instead of finding a common ground between them, thus fomenting the *bias* where political propaganda flourishes. To be able to overcome such a situation one must recognize the power of propaganda and the depths of its influence and become able to question it. Snow also drew attention to what David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times* on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020: “if history is any guide, unlike natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes, pandemics generally drive people apart rather than bring them together”. To corroborate this statement, she reminded us of some email chains claiming that the virus was artificially created with the goal to spread it all over the globe, and especially of how President Trump and Michael Pompeo used to refer to it as “the China virus” or “the Wuhan virus” and this only stopped when the US President himself contracted the virus.

She continued by stating that every nation is striving to contain and overcome the virus. Global cooperation is a fundamental factor in this regard, whereas the only way to fight a viral pandemic is through international support and collaboration. Professor Snow wondered if given the opportunity of going back in time, the G7 nations, or even the G2 (the United States and China), would have nourished something different: Would a global common good determine the national interests, or would national needs remain *sacrosanct*? Do we have the prospect of changing and improving the international collaboration or are we likely to fail and drift apart while trying? Moreover, in a swarm of information where credibility speaks louder than objective truth, such accomplishments might seem intangible, but Snow finished her remarks with the hope that we might turn the scenario around.

Before introducing the second keynote speaker, Dr Kizeková accentuated the importance of pre-existing cooperation between states, and how economics and media relations drive such a cooperation. This fact made it possible for a quicker response to the Covid-19 crisis by international forces.

The second keynote speaker, Dr **Françoise Nicolas**, started her speech titled “**Towards economic deglobalization after the pandemics?**” by pointing out that Covid-19 has led to a global economic crisis. Nicolas expressed her belief that the pandemic will not leave the world unscathed, while also pointing out that the health crises in individual states created an economic crisis, not the other way around. The associated crisis is a global game changer with a predictably large impact, as it is *de facto* the deepest international crisis since the Great Depression. Moreover, it has exposed the weaknesses of the hyper-globalised world economy and brought questions of deglobalisation.

Deglobalisation has thus been discussed as a possible solution for the problem of the pre-existing economic trends and doubts about globalisation, which were accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Two major trends predated the crisis:

1. The rising tensions and pressures between the G2 – the United States and China, leading to their decoupling (i.e., a form of deglobalisation).
2. Doubts about the benefits of globalisation. Experts argued that globalisation had gone too far. This trend of hyper-globalisation was already perceived as excessive and not beneficial.

Dr Nicolas clarified that the crisis has revealed the weakness of globalisation and the vulnerability of global value chains. They are the result of vertical fragmentation of markets and production on a global scale, depending on comparative advantages. This trend allowed for a lowering of the costs of production, but it failed to consider the level of dependency on international factors. The current crisis showed that these highly fragmented value chains are extremely risky. China is at the very heart of these complex global chains. As a result of the lockdown in China, the logistics and supply chains were interrupted, which resulted in a stopping of the production and supplies to markets and producers in other countries, and huge repercussions for the global economy.

In the past we have observed similar phenomena because of natural disasters. However, in this case it was not a natural disaster. Nicolas argued that to a large degree the Covid-19 crisis was *man-made*, identifying the response to the health crisis as a trigger leading to economic problems. The longer and more complex these global value chains are, the bigger the chance of their disruption.

In the past, companies had given priority to economic considerations, i.e., cost efficiency at the expense of security. What they had not understood is that security is a part of cost calculation.

Thus, what we see at the end of this Covid-19 crisis is a change or rearrangement of these priorities. Nicolas argued that the pandemic has led to prioritizing resilience and dependability of production over cost saving through global outsourcing, leading to a major change in the mindset of companies.

Are we heading towards the end of hyper-globalisation or the end of globalisation? There will be actions taken to mitigate some of the problems resulting from the pandemic, e.g., shortening of the value chains and diversification of suppliers. However, as Nicolas noted, this will not necessarily lead to a full deglobalisation. Rather, less globalisation can be expected in the future. In response to this crisis there are two things that should be done:

1. Providing more space for governmental industrial policies and a bigger state intervention.
2. Putting an end to liberal market fundamentalism, i.e. prioritising cost efficiency over any other considerations.

### **Q&A and Debate**

*Q: Do you see a possibility of change in how the United States approaches its relationships with its allies after the 2020 elections? What will the primary message be and is there any topic that, according to you, might come up?*

**Nancy Snow:** Since Trump was elected, he made clear that the country would choose a more aggressive behaviour towards its allies. As a world power it will also have to deal with the consequences. Make no mistake, the shadow of Trump's administration will endure, and I can see him hosting a TV channel. Long after being out of the presidency he will be a social media influencer and will spread the message that the United States is the best country in the world and the best place to be. Furthermore we, and with this I mean we as a country, will have a lot of catching up to do because as for right now we are a laughingstock, because when all eyes turned to the US for guidance, Trump, during the Osaka event in 2019, behaved as if he was representing the hosting country. It feels like there is no space left for anyone else to breathe when he arrives, as if America completely took over. During the pandemic it is ironical how much we depend upon international collaboration in order to overcome it, and to do so we will have to detach from the cult of the figure, and this is a national effort.

*Q: How viable are China's connectivity projects since the timeline had to be disrupted? Will they be able to deliver? Do you see any specific engagements, or changes in the approach towards such projects?*

**Françoise Nicolas:** Being a core part of this crisis, China was extremely important because one possible idea is that they could weaponize the crisis by becoming independent, and this is what makes Covid-19 so dangerous and risky. China could achieve independence since they were in the heart of the problem. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) before the crisis spoke about hard power rather than soft power and this is precisely the change, in my opinion - that this initiative will take a more technological and soft power turn, becoming more of a digital silk road than it was initially intended to be.

We heard a lot about the BRI and now we hear about double circulation. This is the new motto. We do not exactly know what it is about yet, but we know that this is the slogan. As it was with the BRI, we will understand it better as it unfolds. However, they plan to disconnect a little from the world economy and focus on internal circulation by promoting another form of the internal, domestic market, one that is more dynamic, and autonomous. Pushing technological production locally is part of the "Made in China 2025" project and this shall be continued, and if China gets too independent, what could happen is that we would move towards an end of international economic collaboration.

**Nancy Snow:** China is so connected with the notion of domestic economy, but Chinese students are delinked from the world. Chinese students go all over the globe and become information carriers to China and image exporters. Thus, they became a part of the global outrage that is so important to China.

*Q: If education might not be the best answer in protecting ourselves from propaganda, what is it then?*

**Nancy Snow:** We are always looking for an easy way out. Nevertheless, education should include critical thinking and questioning, propaganda, and manipulation courses because that is where our chances of changing it are. Movements such as “Go Vote” do not produce a critical thinker. Education is indeed the solution but if it is, it is in the sense of moving towards critical thinking, because well educated people tend to see themselves as above the mass media’s power, and even myself, I cannot be entirely sure that I am not influenced. I see many of us scholars assume that we have risen above when we are actually so deep into our own circle of information that it is as cluttered and misleading as any other.

### **10:30 – 11:30 Germany and Europe: In Search of a Leadership?**

Chair: **Jakub Eberle** Head of the Centre for European Integration, IIR Prague, Czechia

During the discussion in this panel, the speakers aimed to analyse whether Germany is acting as a leader in the European Union and if so, whether its leadership is successful. The starting point of the debate lay in the fact that Germany, the biggest economy and the central power of the Union, will soon assume the rotating European Union Council Presidency. The debate considered many significant factors, such as the unequal impact that Covid-19 has had on European countries and how this has reopened the discussion about the Eurozone’s architecture as well as broader debates about solidarity among member states. Moreover, the deterioration of the relationship between China and the United States that is currently reshaping the global order, is calling for a geopolitical and geo-economic response from the EU. When it assumes the Presidency of the Council, will Germany be able to rise to the economic and structural challenges of the post-Covid-19 situation? Will it aspire to a leadership role? Will it succeed in making the European Union stronger and coherent? Will the German leadership drive the EU towards a new geopolitical and geo-economic role in the international system?

**Jana Puglierin** Head, ECFR Berlin, Germany

*“How do (European) countries perceive each other? Are there potential coalitions within the EU? What are the policy priorities? The numbers in Germany’s data are actually quite striking and telling because without any doubt Germany is, kind of for years now, the centre of gravity of the European Union.”*

During her intervention Puglierin presented relevant data from the European Coalition Explorer 2020 Survey concerning European countries and their perception of each other, as well as their levels of influence. What emerged from the data is that Germany is considered by 97% of the respondents as the most influential country of the Union and that it represents the fulcrum of crucial alliances and coalitions within the EU. Furthermore, 82% of the answers also identified Germany as the most responsive country, while 75% saw it as the most responsive. As such, according to this data and Puglierin, Germany seems to have both leadership and coalition potential. These results are also in line with Germany’s national perception of its role in the EU, in which it sees itself as an honest and firm broker, and a firm mediator. What also emerges from the Survey is that Germany leads from the centre and not as a hegemon, and it has been argued that Germany’s national representatives significantly stressed that this role represents Germany’s idea of leading.

A significant piece of information regarding this data, as noted by the speaker, is that Italy and Greece as well as the Visegrád 4, for example, identified Germany’s leadership within the EU as a problem and not as a solution to the Union’s issues. However, the data were collected during the debate over the economic measures to take to handle the economic damages of the coronavirus pandemic – this says a lot about how rapidly perceptions within the EU may shift. However, who appears to be the most unhappy with Germany’s leadership is the French.

Summing up, the data shows how much Germany liked the situation before the coronavirus outbreak, a situation in which the European Union was functioning very much in accordance with Germany’s preferences. The outbreak of the virus in the EU led to a significant shift in Germany’s EU policy making concessions that was unthinkable before the pandemic. What remains uncertain is whether those steps, from a German perspective, are a preparation for further integration in the Union.

As for the geopolitics, Puglierin briefly argued that in case of Trump’s 2<sup>nd</sup> presidency, Germany will do everything in its power to lead the EU in strengthening its geopolitical role.

**Pavλίna Janebová** Deputy Research Director, Association for International Affairs, Czechia

*“The coherence of the European Union is something that is in Germany’s vital interest. Strength implies coherence. The EU cannot be strong if it is not coherent.”*

Janebová focused her contribution on the following question: Will Germany succeed in making the EU stronger and more coherent? To do so, she used the Visegrád Group context to expose her point of view on Germany’s role. According to her, the coherence of the European Union represents a vital interest for Germany because as it sees it, without coherence the EU cannot be strong. In the contemporary European Union, there are several dividing lines, with the one between East and West, in which the East is represented by the Visegrád 4, being the most significant. However, the speaker does not believe the divisions are real, but rather something created by political leaders, and she argued that in this specific case the division was created by the Prime Minister of Hungary.

Germany, in this context, with its stance on migration and its criticism towards the decline of the rule of law in Hungary and Poland, has been perceived by the Visegrád Group as their main opponent that they need to define themselves against. However, Germany and the Visegrád 4 have a significant economic partnership of convenience because both sides need the other one. Especially the economies of the Visegrád 4 depend on Germany. Despite this, there are issues that must be clarified to make this cooperation go on over time; Germany’s dilemma in this situation concerns whether it should keep the cooperation as it is and focus on the current state, or whether it should not shy away from difficult issues such as the rule of law in the Visegrád area. Being that the rule of law is a crucial founding pillar of the European Union, the speaker strongly believes that it cannot be spared for the Union to remain strong and further its integration process.

Janebová recalled how Germany, as a leader of the EU, likes to export its political vision, and she also mentioned its ability to emphasize that the rule of law – which is also a pillar of the EU – is something that is indispensable. Moreover, even in regard to the latest Compromise Draft Proposal on the EU funds’ conditions, it has emerged that Germany often opts for leading through compromise instead of from above; indeed, while Angela Merkel could have opted for a strong speech on the rule of law, she opted for compromises.

**Vladimír Handl** Associate Research Fellow, Czechia

*“Making the EU a more coherent and robust actor in IR has been a challenge for everybody. German leadership in this context would have been really important.”*

The main point of Handl’s intervention in the panel is that Germany is suitable for a leadership role given its pro-European inclination but that this depends also (but not only) on the functioning of the Merkel-Von Der Leyen tandem. Additionally, he underlined how Germany has, over the last years, strengthened its commitment to the European Union and demonstrated its acceptance of the Recovery Fund for the post-pandemic economic measures. In doing so, Germany has shown flexibility in a key policy area for the European Union, accepting for the first time a sharing of debts at the European level.

The second point then touched upon the topic of the future of the German Presidency. As Handl underlined, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on a lot of realms and the German Presidency is one of them: many candidates have been prepared for the role of the presidency, but the pandemic has caused many changes to plans. The worry here is that there will not be much progress in the common foreign security policy and common security and defence policy areas – and such progress would significantly further the process of European integration. Indeed, making the Union more coherent and robust also depends on this. German leadership in this context would be significantly important. Moreover, Handl pointed out how the voting system of the European Union also represents an obstacle when it comes to making significant decisions, as in the case of the sanctions against Belarus; there will be a need for the Member States to also work on this.

In this context, the French-German tandem is not working out smoothly on matters of security and defence. Indeed, while Macron recently warned about a “NATO brain death” and opened the discussion about the French nuclear deterrent’s extension to the EU, Germany is more oriented towards strategic autonomy in security and defence, and it is still focused on strengthening the European Union and NATO defence framework. According to the speaker, even though there will not be big changes in this area, a lot will depend on the results of the United States elections and as such, there is a necessity for the EU to become more sovereign. In the context of the China-United States rivalry, the speaker said that the Covid-19 pandemic

“helped us avoid the US-China Summit” and that he believes the EU is not ready for this summit because of its internal disunity.

As a last comment, Handl underlined Merkel’s ability to forge compromises, which has influenced the handling of the last three crises in the European Union. This has also rendered Germany a status quo power in the Union – even though the perception of this is not the same in every European country.

**Hans Kundnani** Senior Research Fellow, Chatham House, Great Britain

*“What does that mean, to lead the EU? I do not see the possibility. In a way I think this one of the lessons of 20<sup>th</sup> century European history: that if one EU country can lead Europe, it can’t be the sole leader, even if it’s done in a Bismarckian way.”*

Kundnani’s main point in this panel was that there has been a crisis of leadership in the European Union over the last years and that it is his opinion that no country can lead the European Union individually, not even Germany. As he sees the situation, the European Union only works if Germany and France work together – a thought that he shares with Janebová.

Commenting on what the first speaker said about the role of Germany ruling from the centre, being well connected and being an honest broker, Kundnani argued that this is the role that Germany has always played and that, according to him, it is largely a function of its size and location, which reminds him of a Bismarckian system. Indeed, the role of Germany as an honest broker represents precisely how Bismarck conceived ruling in Europe – a way that Kundnani identifies as problematic since no country can lead the European Union alone given the anti-hegemonic purpose for which it has been created.

Moreover, the history of the European Union has seen leaderships made up by coalitions and not by a single entity; the Franco-German coalition and the “three model” of leading the European Union – i.e. Germany, France, and Great Britain leading it – are examples of that. However, after the enlargement of the Union there has been a crisis of leadership given that the previous models did not really include the new members. Even though Kundnani identifies the crisis, he is not sure about what the solution to it could be.

Finally, regarding the Visegrád 4, Kundnani analysed the relationship between them and Germany. What is interesting to him is that they evolved as a unit in the European Union, but this did not have a real impact until 2015, when they presented themselves as an anti-German coalition, though according to Kundnani, their anti-German views are the reason why they got together in the first place.

## **Q&A and Debate**

*Q: How do you think other nations, and perhaps especially the EU’s neighbouring states, view the EU’s leadership?*

Puglierin commented on Kundnani’s statement that Germany’s leadership in the EU is just a matter of its geography and size. She argued that Germany rather gained this position by being an advocate for other states: when new initiatives were developed it was Germany who advocated on behalf to the EU for bringing together as many actors as possible, and this is also true when it comes to the Central and Eastern European members, given that Germany has often acted as an advocate for them, especially in communications with Paris. However, all the speakers agreed on the fact that the European Union does not work properly if Germany and France do not work together, even though it has been stated that Germany is highly capable of giving coherence to European politics. Another point made during the debate was that Germany has often found a way to pursue its own interests in parallel with the European ones, such as in the Greek-Turkish dispute – there it merged the European interest in solving the crisis diplomatically with its national interest in Turkey as a strategic partner in the migration field.

Finally, all the speakers agreed that external nations see Germany as the point of reference for the European Union or as the state which other states approach if they want to talk with the European Union. However, according to Janebová France, too, is to be considered relevant when it comes to European external relations.

## **10:30-12:00 Connectivity in Eurasia: Strategies, Intra-connectivity and Challenges**

Chair: **Alica Kizeková** Senior Researcher, IIR Prague, Czechia

In this segment, the experts explored topics of connecting Eurasia, and connectivity and intra-connectivity in Europe's adjacent regions as well as Central Asia in the post-Covid-19 context. More specifically, the themes of the conversation ranged from topics such as human connectivity and the impact of the pandemic on existing projects in the region, to the importance of the creation of a European model of sustainable and digital connectivity. In the second part of the discussion, the experts were asked to answer a series of questions mainly revolving around the compatibility of key players' strategies in the Central Asian region as well as the potential challenges that Covid-19 might pose in the future, and what possible recommendations could be made to resolve these issues.

**Andreas Marazis** Head of Research for Eastern & Central Asia, ENC, Belgium

Human connectivity was the pivot around which Marazis' speech revolved. The Head of Research for Eastern and Central Asia indeed focused on the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable communities in Central Asia. More specifically, he presented a project aimed at the identification and mapping of media information consumption among disadvantaged communities in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan following the breakout of the pandemic.

Bearing in mind that Marazis identifies vulnerable groups with ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, and stateless people, he stressed the imperative of safeguarding these communities during emergency crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, because of their strong exposure to violent extremist threats. Therefore, the researcher highlighted the bond between connectivity, inter- and intranational connections and the resilience of society.

Since Covid-19 has hindered connectivity-related projects in the region of Central Asia and has decelerated the relations between Europe and Asia, it is true that the pandemic has had severe repercussions on these communities' lives. Among others, it is possible to report two main issues caused by Covid-19:

- The economic impact: financial difficulties can be classified as the most striking effect of the coronavirus. Nearly all migrants reported unemployment since they lost their jobs either temporarily or permanently because of it. In addition to that, many cannot even afford basic goods like food or access to the internet.
- The psychological impact: it goes without saying that Covid-19 has created a general atmosphere of panic. However, the virus has become an especially worrying factor to those vulnerable communities which are already ostracised by the rest of society because of their disadvantages in terms of legal status, knowledge of the host country's language and lack of belonging.

**Sinikukka Saari** Senior Associate Analyst, EUISS, France

Saari opened her speech by questioning the nature of the coronavirus as a game changer in terms of connectivity and, more generally, globalisation. According to her, Covid-19 has been more of a catalyst than a game changer. Alternatively stated, the virus is an intervening factor which is accelerating - and sometimes even decelerating- existing trends.

As a catalyst, not only has Covid-19 drawn the world's attention to the vulnerability and fragility of connectivity but it has mainly emphasised the growing necessity of a more digital model of connectivity which will eventually lead to the recalibration and adaptation of existing policies. Thus, Saari pointed out that the perception of connectivity will change on two main levels:

- Because of the current alteration in the nature of connectivity, it will be necessary to

- shift the existing projects from infrastructure projects to digital ones.
- In the long run, two main models of connectivity will stand out: authoritarian and sustainable connectivity.

Saari explained that because of these two existing trends, connectivity will be perceived in more geostrategic terms and it will become yet another matter of competition among states, given that global flows will be built on it. In particular, the main actors in this growing rivalry will be China and Russia, presenting a model of authoritarian connectivity, and, on the other side, the European Union and the United States, which will rely on a more sustainable model of connectivity. However, Saari clarified that these trends are not direct results of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemics: indeed, they had already existed previously, and the virus is simply speeding them up.

**Jakub Jakóbowski** Senior Fellow, OSW, Poland

Jakóbowski pivoted his speech on the concept of intraconnectivity by enhancing the role of Eastern and Central Europe as an essential hub regarding the connectivity not only between Europe and Asia but also within the European Union itself.

In this context, the researcher outlined the binary nature of connectivity, stating that it presents both an economic and a strategic aspect. Undoubtedly, a better interconnectedness would lead to an increasing number of economic conversions among countries. Therefore, to make this point clearer Jakóbowski listed the different layers embodied by intra- and interconnectivity:

- The energy sphere: on the one hand, a more diversified source of energy will lead to the strengthening of the European Union as an economic player at a global level. On the other hand, in more political terms, if that were to happen, the European Union would become less dependent on Russia, which often strategically exploits its position as the EU's main provider of energy to blackmail and corrupt its member states.
- The transportation sphere: in the last few decades, the number of trains crossing Central Europe to transport goods from Europe to Asia has significantly inflated. Nevertheless, many eastern ports present meaningful infrastructural gaps. It will be necessary to invest in the sustainability of this infrastructure to secure and facilitate those flows.
- The digital sphere: as it was said before, there is an emerging competition between the Western sustainable model of connectivity and the Chinese-Russian authoritarian model of connectivity. In this field, Eastern Europe has taken a leading role in the debate on how to secure digital connectivity and base it on a coherent pattern of transparency.

**Janka Oertel** Director of the Asia Programme, ECFR Berlin, Germany

Oertel, in her contribution, stressed the importance of European sovereignty as a crucial project to expand to tackle the growing geostrategic tensions between the European Union and China. In this respect, she mentioned a series of initiatives seized by the European Union.

As far as the defensive side of the European agenda is concerned, the Union has realised how we need to be connected to the rest of the world to become more competitive. Subsequently, the European institutions have been applying a series of measures and procedures with the purpose of boosting the existing infrastructures.

However, the defensive side of the agenda seems to be the strongest point to address the mounting Chinese threat. Oertel claimed that an inclusive, digital, competitive, and sustainable connectivity can be Europe's positive solution to the coronavirus crisis. Against this background, the European Recovery Fund plays a substantial role. Indeed, in her view, the Union must invest this capital in connectivity infrastructure projects that will put the economy on a green footing.

For all these reasons, she remarked on the relevance of the European financial framework. She indeed said: “[The present time] is a crucial moment during which connectivity can be Europe’s positive answer to the world, and it can put the EU on a long term competitive and sustainable footing”. To do this, the European Union is compelled to invest in a fully global European connectivity that would go beyond mere Euro-Asian relations and look at India, Africa and even Latin America as new partners.

**Rudolf Fürst** Head, Centre for EU-Asia Relations, IIR Prague, Czechia

Fürst based his intervention on an explanation of a case study on the cooperation between China and Eastern Europe during the Covid-19 outbreak within the 17+1 format. This format, which is an initiative aimed at promoting the cooperation between China and the 17 CEE states, includes a platform for cooperation on healthcare.

The aim of these types of initiatives is to address the global security risks deriving from outbreaks of diseases such as Covid-19 or Ebola. In addition to that, these cooperation mechanisms are intended to intensify the exchange of knowledge between healthcare institutions of the signatory countries. Despite its ambitious nature, Fürst observed that the 17+1 programme is more efficient as part of the Chinese propaganda rather than as a cooperative European project as it is mainly oriented to strategic planning. Undoubtedly, the format presents a series of structural flaws, with a major one being that China is effectively more interested in Western European countries than Eastern European ones. Furthermore, the international and domestic politicisation of the pandemic has had notable side effects, considering that the Covid-19 crisis has significantly contributed to the proliferation of a negative narrative regarding the Chinese government. As a matter of fact, the spread of the pandemic is “a great case of China losing face”, as Fürst argued.

**Bruce Pannier** Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Czechia

The aim of Pannier’s speech was to put the spotlight on the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic in the region of Central Asia. As he mentioned during the conference, there are several projects installed in Central Asia for the development of the region, which is a pivotal area and a crossroads between Europe and Asia. Before the breakout of the pandemic, many infrastructures had been built or modernised so that the area could hold up to its function. However, the outbreak of the disease has had severe consequences on the imports and exports of the Central Asian countries.

In financial terms, it is necessary to say that these countries are beneficiaries of a series of loans, some of which target the modernisation of their transportation systems. Nonetheless, because of the restrictions on traffic, many of these infrastructures have not been able to operate at full capacity. Therefore, some countries will face problems with repaying these loans.

In addition to that, there is a series of challenges related to the trade system. On the one hand, as far as imports from Central Asian nations are concerned, because of the internalisation of many products some countries have been forced to start their own domestic productions of such goods. This will undoubtedly lead to a decrease in exports towards this geographic area. On the other hand, in terms of exports, these states mainly base their economies and budgets on the sale of hydrocarbons. However, because of the virus, many countries were compelled to lessen their purchases of supplies of gas and oil. Inevitably, the Central Asian countries are confronting harsh economic implications.

### **Q&A and Debate**

*Q: Do you foresee any challenges in your respective field of interest and what do you recommend to overcome these obstacles?*

Marazis pointed out a series of hardships currently being faced in the Central Asian region: Covid-19 indeed hinders the access of some groups to their country’s education system and drastically reduces the possibilities of employment of these vulnerable groups. Therefore, it is essential to promote the funding of training programs as well as to support exchanges with Asian journalists.

Saari highlighted how the new rising paradigm of connectivity translates very badly to the currently existing classical power politics. Therefore, she stressed how necessary it is to forge a new model of inclusive connectivity and healthy competition, considering how exclusive connectivity is “a recipe for failure”. This is

particularly meaningful in respect to Central Asian regions because of the exclusion they experienced in Soviet times.

Competition seemed to be the focus of Fürst's intervention as well, as he stressed the need to bypass the growing competitive and negative clash of discourse in the European environment and to focus instead on the real positive effects of the European Union. Oertel, in response, agreed on the point that connectivity needs to be inclusive and Central Asia must play a big role in it. However, the pursuit of new partners like India or Japan might be crucial for Europe because such new partners would help it avoid an excessive reliance on China.

*Q: How compatible are the connectivity strategies of key players in selected regions?*

Pannier emphasised that Europe is facing growing criticism of how it will compete with powers like China or the United States in the field of connectivity. Jakóbowski explained that there is indeed growing competition both inside and outside the European Union, with China and the US as the main players. Therefore, the main challenge is that of creating frameworks for healthy competition by always safeguarding the Union's interests.

### **13:00-14:00 Coalition-Building: The Views from the Visegrád Four Countries**

Chair: **Vladimír Bartovic** Director, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, Czechia

The aim of this panel was to discuss the new dynamics created by Brexit within the European Union, and in the European Foreign and Security Policy, from the point of view of the Visegrád countries. One of the central questions was thus whether the departure of the United Kingdom has shaken the coalition, and how these new dynamics may be beneficial to the V4 and the rest of the Union.

The Czech Republic's upcoming presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022 presents a strong opportunity to shift the focus of the EU's foreign policy towards matters important for the Visegrád countries. This is especially the case at a time when the European neighbourhood is increasingly unstable, as shown by the reinvigorated conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, the protests in Belarus, or the situation in Ukraine.

**Radovan Geist** Editor-in-Chief, EURACTIV.sk, Slovakia

Geist underlined that when it comes to its contribution to the European foreign policy, the Visegrád coalition has been rather ineffective for two main reasons:

- The absence of a common position of the Visegrád countries on the crisis in the EU neighbourhoods, or towards the EU's global partners.
- The Visegrád countries' lack of capacity to contribute to the European policy, both individually and collectively.

Yet, since 2015 the V4 have been getting more attention due to their position on the European immigration policy. In a previous panel, one of the speakers mentioned that the Visegrád countries had not only blocked decisions on the EU level, but even managed to completely shift the debate in Germany and the rest of the Union. To this observation Geist added that the V4 have presented no solution to this question, causing the discussion on a common position regarding migration issues to stagnate for the last five years.

The United Kingdom has focused most of its efforts on the transatlantic cooperation. Thus, Brexit could be expected to bring a new impetus to the European foreign policy. Unfortunately, this change has yet to happen. A more independent and stronger European foreign policy is conceivable under certain conditions: The EU has to increase its military capacities in order to defend its own interests in the areas of economic relations, trade and human rights values on the international level. Besides this, a more assertive external and commercial policy towards Russia and China is crucial.

The Visegrád countries may have a role to play in this process. A discussion on what their real interests vis a vis Russia and/or China are, is thus necessary. Do they still want to be some kind of bridge between China

and the EU? Or is China simply using our internal differences to increase its influence? The energetic dependence on Russia is also a question which could be addressed collectively. The V4 were once advocating a more active EU involvement in the crisis in the EU neighbourhood. The role of the V4 could then be to advocate a more coherent EU Neighbourhood Policy specifically towards countries like Germany, which are more reluctant and prefer to define the foreign policy according to economic and trade interests. The V4 could thus call for a more proactive and 'value-based foreign policy'. But this requires that the V4 develop their own capacities so that they can contribute to this European foreign policy.

**Mats Braun** Metropolitan University Prague, Czechia

The speaker focused on the topic of coalition building. Expecting the Visegrád Group to vote as a block all the time in the Council, is the wrong understanding of how this coalition can be useful. The goal of the coalition is to enhance the capacity of each member by providing expertise on certain subjects, and help each other with lines of argumentation on various topics in the council.

Brexit has changed the dynamics within the Council, giving more importance to smaller states and making it easier to form a blocking minority.

The immigration topic brought more visibility to the V4 group and contributed to establishing it as a *brand* in the region. Studies have shown that up to fifteen countries were opposed to the permanent redistribution scheme for refugees proposed by the Commission. The V4 were the voice of this opposition, and they used this opportunity to get more recognition.

With the Czech Council presidency of 2022, it is desirable to come back to the topic which originally made the identity of the Visegrád Group: the enlargement of the Union to the Eastern neighbourhood and the Balkans. Since the Visegrád Declaration of 2004, the group has developed a rather coherent approach to this topic. Unfortunately, they face another challenge: The V4 have advertised themselves as successful examples of rapid transition and integration into European structures. This image is getting increasingly difficult to sell as they face more and more criticism regarding their rule of law record.

Braun concluded that contrary to the previous intervention, he believes that outside the discussion on the European enlargement and their expertise on the Eastern neighbourhood, the V4 can only have a limited importance in the EU foreign policy.

**Márton Ugródsy** Director of IFAT, Hungary

Ugródsy underlined the necessity to make a distinction between the political and economic priorities. He noted that in regard to economic questions, there is a good cooperation between the EU member states: "Apart from the political lip service the single market seems to function very effectively." The debate over the European enlargement has both a political and an economic dimension. For the V4, the enlargement of the Union is not only about pushing the EU borders further east; it is also about great economic opportunities. Most of their firms have the potential to expand to Ukraine or the Caucasus. On the political side, Ugródsy put forward the expertise of the V4 in the EU Neighbourhood Policy, arguing that they tend to know the Eastern neighbourhood better than, for instance, the German and French governments and even the business sector.

On the other hand, as a response to a remark made by Geist, Ugródsy expressed his scepticism about the supposed necessity for the V4 to become a bridge for China or Russia. These major powers already have their ways with the EU and its major states. The best example of this, according to Ugródsy, is the ties and trade relations they have with Germany. According to Ugródsy, it seems the EU attempts to maintain a common position on foreign affair matters such as the situation in Hong Kong or the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, but when it comes to economic benefits, each State tends to play individually. For instance, there cannot be a common foreign policy as long as some countries benefit from an energetic deal with Russia while others pay extra for the same natural resources. In order to get an effective and coordinated EU foreign policy, these are the topics that need to be tackled.

**Konrad Poplawski** Head of the Central European Department, OSW Poland

According to Poplawski if the V4 coalition lacked efficiency in the past, it is because no deep cooperation was needed. The political institutions were working well, and the states experienced a satisfying economic growth.

Their cooperation became necessary and effective only as certain common interests became important topics, such as the 2015 migration crisis or the multi-annual financial framework.

Today the usefulness of the Visegrád coalition must be put in context: "The cosy conditions are over." The global geopolitical context as well as the internal dynamics of the EU have changed. The rivalry between the US and China is increasing, making the cooperation of European countries with all their partners more complex. In technology, for example, the world is divided between Huawei and the American firms (GAFAs). Germany has already received strong pressures regarding its choice of a 5G provider.

Within in the EU we can observe the rising pressure France is putting on the Union to reinforce its autonomy. Here, the V4 need to be vigilant so as not to disturb what brought their political and economic success in the last decade: their economic integration with Western Europe and their accession to NATO as a security provider. The current transatlantic stress is bringing division within NATO. Consequently, it is in the V4's interest to improve the cohesion of NATO and the transatlantic relations in general.

Besides, the EU is slowly changing, and there is a strong potential for reforms ahead, be they on the single market or regarding the industrial policy. It is crucial for the Visegrád Group to take part in these reforms in order not to be left behind. This is so because the economic growth, based on foreign direct investments, is limited. It needs new impulses which could be driven by EU funds, such as the EU New Generation funds. It is also necessary to engage in the process of back/near-shoring, which means bringing back foreign investments from Asia. In Poplawski's opinion, we (the V4) still have many unidentified vital economic interests, but we need to work more on them, and on our position towards the US and China. He also believes that we could be one of the drivers of the EU agenda in the coming years.

### **Q&A and Debate**

*Q: In your opinion, in regard to which foreign policy issues could the V4 countries be an effective coalition? Which of the other EU states would you consider to be the V4's closest allies in dealing with these issues?*

**Konrad Poplawski:** Poplawski said that given the changing geopolitical context we see a potential for some agreements even on issues with which this was unbelievable before. Even in relation to Russia. Concerning Belarus, which is connected to Russia, the solidarity between the V4 countries has been outstanding, in his view. Poplawski expressed his surprise at how much support the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary have given to Belarus, and how active they were in this regard.

Regarding the Chinese question, in Poplawski's opening remarks, he stated that it sometimes feels like it is not possible to move forward on this issue. But as a former expert on Germany, he witnessed an important change of the debate concerning China. It is even probable, in his view, that Germany will rule out Huawei as a 5G network builder. This was unbelievable just a year ago. Thus, many foreign policy issues which were thought to be undisputed for years are now contested. He said that again, the main interest of the V4 countries is to de-escalate the transatlantic tensions. The Three Seas initiative is a good format to strengthen the related economic relations and provide a second pillar to the US-EU relation, so it is not only centred on security but also on the economy. We largely focus on controversial issues, but we should not forget that the economic relations with the US, and especially with Western European States, are strong. We talk a lot about the German dependency on China but rarely mention the importance of US trade in Germany's economy. Poplawski's second point was that we should talk more about China. If the EU wants to have a more global foreign policy, the V4 need to give it their input on China, because the near/back-shoring is a great opportunity for our economic prosperity.

**Martin Ugródsy:** He said that in regard to the topic of European foreign policy, most European countries have their own expertise. One way to have a more harmonised foreign policy would be to come to an agreement; if we acknowledge that Eastern Europe is a priority for the V4, then the Western States may, in exchange, rely on their support in operations in North Africa, the Sahel or other regions.

As for the second part of the question, Ugródsy said that economically speaking, Germany is an obvious partner for the V4. Ugródsy believes the choice Germany will make regarding the 5G network development, will be followed by Central and Eastern European countries. On other issues, such as the European strategic

autonomy, which could also serve the European defence against any foreign adversary, migration or terrorism, there is a broad horizon of opportunities for global coalitions.

**Mats Braun:** Braun said that Belarus is indeed a good example of a functioning cooperation. The Visegrad Group and the EU foreign policy have similar issues that are linked to political contestation. In the Czech Republic, for instance, topics such as Russia or China are subjects of contestation within the country. Thus, expecting the V4 coalition to constantly have similar answers is unrealistic. But certainly on concrete matters such as trade, border protection or the Western Balkans, we see that the V4 can deliver a real synchronised response. And even though the opening remarks may have been perceived as presenting a pessimistic view of the V4, it is important to underline the V4 members' strong culture of sharing and consulting between political leaders and civil servants.

*Q: You mentioned the Three Seas Initiative. Do you believe it has a real potential without Germany as a member?*

**Konrad Poplawski:** Poplawski said that Germany is already on board this project, since Heiko Maas has visited some of the summits. There are declarations from the European Commission saying this project is complementary to the European Cohesion Funds, or to the EU. It is a chance to open the debate with Central Europe and allow it to set its economic priorities. Since the Central European countries have benefited from a great economic development as a subcontractor, it is time for them to become one of the EU's centres of growth.

**Radovan Geist:** Geist stated that the coordination culture within the V4 is real and important. It should be further developed among ministries, of course, but also among academic institutions and think tanks, where the contacts are quite intensive. This could provide a platform involving experts and academics from other EU countries where more general issues related to EU policy could be discussed.

In response to the first part of the question, Geist said that it is true that the V4 countries should be more involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy towards eastern Ukraine, Belarus and the Balkans. But to participate in the EU foreign policy in general, the Visegrád countries need to develop their complementary regional capacities, activities, and initiative, or develop investments that are complementary to the EU's. A good example is the energy policy. The planned energy inter-connector, if developed, could help the V4 strategically as well as economically and strengthen the position of the EU as a whole. A precondition for an efficient contribution of the Visegrád countries to the EU policy is that they should try to cooperate whenever possible and try to find complementary regional activities and institutional instruments that would help both the V4 and the EU.

*Q: What is Visegrád's official position in relation to the poisoning of Navalny? Are the members discussing any sanctions towards Russia?*

**Radovan Geist:** Geist said that there was an official condemnation of the poisoning and a demand for action. Sanctions are being discussed not only among the V4, but Heiko Maas also mentioned them as a necessary response from the EU. Geist also mentioned that Nord Stream II should be part of it. He also said that we should probably engage with the German partner in the discussion of this topic.

*Q: Do you think it is a realistic proposal that in the next five years, at least one area of decision making, for instance sanctions, should be moved to the category of qualified majority voting?*

All four speakers agreed that it is a good, yet somehow not very realistic idea. **Ugródsy noted that** if it happens, it will be a result of a political compromise, and we will see what price will have to be paid in order to reach it.

### **13:00–14:00 The European Green Deal: Goals and Pitfalls**

Chair: **Tomáš Profant** Senior Researcher, IIR Prague, Czechia

The chair presented the European Green Deal, defining it as an initiative focusing on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, which sets long term goals in lowering the percentage of gas emissions and reducing the carbon footprint in the EU. The Paris Agreement has been criticized by many, but also praised for maintaining its achievements in the environmental field. The general aim of the European Green Deal is to turn environmental challenges into opportunities to make the EU's economy sustainable and promote growth. The position of the Czech Republic and a few other countries towards it is ambivalent and rather pragmatic. The chair posed a few questions: On one hand, what is each speaker's position towards the European Green Deal? If it is possible to evaluate it, what is the most important thing about it? And on the other hand, considering that the measures the EU has taken towards climate change during the last decades have not been enough, is it meaningful to argue about their effectiveness?

**Per Espen Stokness** Director, Centre for Sustainability and Energy, Norwegian Business School, Norway

Stokness opened the dialogue by presenting his views, and Norway's position towards the matter, and offering the audience an in-depth presentation of what is the growth that the European Green Deal is aiming for. The basic question was whether it is possible to have eternal growth on a limited planet. The answer will be based on how exactly we define the terms eternal and growth, and which are the limits we are referring to. The EU has set goals and is taking actions towards moving from the grey growth that prevails due to the material use since 1970, to green growth. This would mean managing wastefulness and focusing on problems connected to climate change, land system change, biogeochemical flows, biosphere integrity, etc. For this plan to be feasible, the grey growth model from the 1900s needs to be replaced with a genuine green growth model. One example of how to achieve such targets is the replacement of older cars with electric ones, as this way the greenhouse gas emissions will be minimized. Another target would be to consume for food, items that require less resource use. In the director's own words, "If we can have any goal at all, we need to fix the impact that grey growth is having at the very least".

**Nina Treu** Co-founder of the Laboratory for New Economic Ideas in Leipzig, Germany

The second speaker offered a different perspective on the matter. Focusing on the European Green Deal, Treu specified that the plan should be judged for its effectiveness as a policy framework for the problem that it tackles. She continued by supporting the argument that it is an ambitious plan. As we disagree on the scope of the problem, especially since we have already reached the tipping points, the EGD is not enough to solve it. Climate change is only a small part of the problem we are facing. As prominence is placed on the need to address the social and democratic problems as well as the environmental ones, it is understandable that all the problems are linked to the core of our economic system and therefore difficult to solve one by one. The current economic system is not oriented to serving people's needs but designed to grow. Unfortunately, there is no growth without the use of resources. Treu presented the prevailing solutions to the issue:

- Ignore climate change – argue about its existence
- The EGD – take the grey economy and re-green the system
- Start a profound social-ecological transformation of the economic system

She expressed her support for the idea that the EGD is a way to get the emissions relatively down whereas we need them to go absolutely down, and in order to achieve that, we need to move forward with the transformation. Concluding, she stated that the system we should be aiming for has not been found yet, but there are measures taking us in the right direction.

After the opening statements of both of the esteemed guests, in which they shared their knowledge from their respective fields, the discussion that followed concentrated on the present mobility system, the energies used up until now and what options there are to replace them with intelligent ones without inefficient and wasteful practices.

#### **14:10-15:10 Building a Sustainable Future for Post-conflict Areas in the European Neighbourhood: Transitional Justice and Reintegration in Syria and Iraq**

Chair: **Jan Daniel** Researcher, IIR Prague, Czechia

*"Justice is possible; it is done in practice, but there are a number of challenges mainly due to the existence of this new phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters" - Petra Ditrichová*

In this segment, the experts aimed at providing the audience with basic information on the initiatives undertaken by both international organizations and single states with the purpose of establishing stabilisation in post-conflict areas like Iraq or regions where war is still ongoing, such as Syria. The discussion tackled themes such as human rights and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, particular attention was given to the topic of preventing violent extremism as well as potential future threats. Therefore, the experts emphasised the essentiality of promoting long-term stabilisation in regions impacted by ISIS or other terrorist organisations with the purpose of creating a safe area where human rights are respected.

**Lukáš Gjurič** Head of the Unit of the Arab Levant & the Persian Gulf, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

The speaker opened the debate through an illustration of the leading initiatives carried out by the Czech government in the MENA region. The MENA area (Middle East and North Africa) is currently forced into a situation of political fallout and a grave humanitarian emergency. Clearly, terrorist organizations have found a fertile ground in this socially and politically collapsing panorama. Therefore, the related Czech activities strive for the stabilisation of the region and mainly provide it with humanitarian assistance. For instance, a considerable percentage of the money invested by the government is allocated to the Lebanese and Jordanian governments, with the intention of supporting their handling of the incoming waves of migrants and refugees.

However, Gjurič explained that most of the invested money is headed to Iraq and Syria. In particular, the Czech Republic helps the Iraqi government to revitalize some of the existing obsolete assistance infrastructure, which will eventually shelter internally displaced people and repatriates. Yet, the Iraqi system is extremely corrupted, and thus a substantial part of the money has to be spent in improving the bureaucracy and solving other political inefficiencies there. Nevertheless, the ongoing conflict in Syria makes this country the greatest challenge. Although the Czech Republic provides the region with hospital and sanitary equipment, some countries have sometimes tried to stop the flow of goods towards Syria. In addition to that, international organisations like the UN are currently trying to collect evidence of war crimes in Syria, whereas in Iraq they are seeking for proof of a possible collaboration between ISIL and the Iraqi government.

**Ulrich Garms** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Austria

Garms opened his speech by emphasising the ODC's aspiration to protect the world from organised crime and terrorism. With this purpose, the institution assists member states in the reinforcement of their criminal justice systems and supports the cooperation among countries in the area of crime prevention. He also stated that justice and reintegration can indeed be thought of in a series of frameworks.

As far as the terrorism framework is concerned, Garms explained that the United Nations and the Office on Drugs and Crime support the implementation of the so-called PRR (Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration) strategies. These principles not only apply to terrorists who returned to their homelands from Syria and Iraq, but they are also suitable for their families because they facilitate their reinsertion into society. More notably, the UN provides women who were victims of terrorist groups and were forced to undergo gender or sexual abuse, with specific assistance. Furthermore, the United Nations developed programmes to fight against child recruitment.

Simultaneously, in terms of the transitional justice framework the UN strives for the prosecution of terrorists by its member states, as well as for the development of a specific agenda to guarantee the non-repetition of terrorism-related crimes. Moreover, Garms stressed the connection between reducing violence, promoting justice and delivering inclusive and peaceful societies, which are established through following the principle of sustainable development.

**Petra Ditrichová** Ministry of Defence, Czechia

Ditrichová explored the legal dimension of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, particularly in relation to the growing phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. The expert argued that it would be vain to engage in a total restoration of peace and international security without the application of adequate post-conflict justice principles. Notably, in the case of foreign terrorist fighters the international community has encountered a few difficulties in defining the legal obligations towards these criminals. In brief, because of the lack of consensus on a universal definition of a foreign fighter, international institutions had to discuss how and where such perpetrators should be held accountable for their crimes.

The speaker then listed three main options for the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters:

- Prosecution by national courts in Iraq and Syria: this option is grounded on the principle of territoriality and criminal law, which provides the sovereign state with the authority to prosecute criminal offenses committed within its borders. Although it presents many advantages because national investigators have open access to battlefield evidence, this principle is rather inconvenient in areas suffering from a rule of law crisis like Syria and Iraq.
- Prosecution by foreign national courts: it allows the use of domestic jurisdictions on the condition that the crime is perpetrated either by a national of the country or against the country itself. However, as for most serious crimes, these courts may prosecute people regardless of their nationality.
- Ensuring justice by international tribunals: this principle is not applicable to the cases of Syria and Iraq.

Although states usually tend to prosecute terrorist acts based on counterterrorism jurisdiction, Ditrichová highlighted the essentiality of post-conflict justice. She claimed indeed that “post-conflict justice helps the state to move from the past into a better future and it also prevents the renewal of the conflicts”.

### **Tomáš Kocian** People in Need, Czechia

Kocian spoke from a more humanitarian point of view rather than a political one. He elucidated the concept of intervening in an environment shredded by war, such as Syria. Above all, he argued that humanitarian aid has to respect the notions of independence, neutrality and impartiality. It is also vital to take into consideration the vulnerability of the states where humanitarian organisations are operating.

Furthermore, humanitarian organisations are bound to pay attention to two main principles: assessing the individual’s necessities, and assessing the society’s necessities. Unfortunately, these two principles are clashing on the Syrian soil and this leads to a potential conflict between the parts. In concrete terms, Kocian reported how humanitarian organizations usually carefully select the beneficiaries of their initiatives and how this has led to a strong opposition and dissatisfaction on the community level. In particular, some tribal leaders organised riots because of their dissatisfaction with their exclusion from humanitarian programmes. In addition to that, Kocian claimed he witnessed cases in which the recipients of humanitarian aid were forced to share their goods with others.

For all these reasons, Kocian emphasised the essentiality of promoting humanitarian aid principles with the purpose of delivering effective and tangible humanitarian aid on the ground. Therefore, he concluded by saying that “humanitarian organizations have to really promote very actively and assertively the principles of humanitarian aid because that’s the only way to deliver humanitarian assistance on the ground to the right people”.

### **Q&A and Debate**

Garms added some information about the ODC initiatives aimed at preventing and countering terrorism. In the framework of humanitarian aid, the institution is working in cooperation with national justice and security actors to integrate humanitarian action in the counterterrorism context. Furthermore, the ODC is cooperating with social media companies to prevent the diffusion of violent extremist ideas through social media.

*Q: What forms of post-conflict justice have so far proved to be the most efficient?*

Ditrichová explained how usually, different forms of post-conflict violence work in parallel and are therefore not mutually exclusive. However, she added that if we compare various national jurisdictions, we notice that there is a multitude of different approaches to the foreign extremist fighter phenomenon, which represents one of the biggest challenges for the future.

*Q: Do you see any positive development of the crisis of the rule of law mechanism in Syria?*

Kocian was quite sceptical about it and argued that reconciliation is far beyond any future prospect. Indeed, besides the major distrust towards authorities, Syria is currently dealing with the issue of internally displaced people who are stateless and ostracised by the rest of the community. Gjurič added that the Czech government is currently focusing more on the political developments that are currently going on in Geneva in order to commit to a wider approach to helping people in Syria.

## **14:10–15:10 Towards Inclusive Democracies: Women’s Representation, Leadership, Security and International Relations**

Chair: **Alica Kizeková** Senior Researcher, IIR Prague, Czechia

The goal of this roundtable was to share thoughts about women's participation and the improvements to their representation in leadership, diplomacy, international politics, and security from different points of view. What is at the core of the idea of including women in high politics is that achieving gender equality is not just a matter of numbers; rather it is a matter of exploring needs, roles and priorities of both men and women as they relate to their respective positions. Communication has to be improved and stereotypes have to be challenged in order to foster an enabling environment for changes through women's participation and the creation of opportunities for women. The following questions were posed to the participants: Do women have specific contributions to make that are different from those of other genders in diplomacy, leadership, international relations, sustainability and security? How does an adequate inclusion of women in debates contribute to changing the discourse and thus challenging the dominant foreign policy and security narratives? What is the most pressing issue beyond the Covid-19 pandemic that is revealed through the health crisis?

**Ayesha Patricia Rekhi** Ambassador of Canada to the Czech Republic

Ambassador Rekhi opened her speech at the roundtable by affirming that there is a high level of gender equality in Canada due to the policy adopted by the Government that identified women as a powerful resource in the high politics domain and made gender equality a priority. Indeed, as affirmed by the Canadian Prime Minister, for Canada, putting women in leadership positions in any field is not just the right thing to do or the nice thing to do; it is the smart thing to do. In Canada it is not just a matter of legal arguments sustaining this; rather it is also a strategic move because Canadians know that narrowing gender gaps helps society to grow from various point of views. This has been sustained also by relevant academic research, especially in the field of foreign policy. Indeed, women's participation has helped in finding more durable solutions to global problems thanks to the resulting diversity. Canada sees this approach as being really successful.

The Canadian approach consists of:

- Concrete investments
- Mobilizing men and boys
- Increasing women's representation

In the Canadian view, investing in women is crucial for tackling the most pressing international challenges and allowing further economic, social and political progress. A barrier to that is evident especially in the peace building realm, where research shows that when they are conducted by women, peace negotiations are most likely to be durable and the agenda in the peace resolution is usually broadened; however, at the negotiation tables we still see a very small number of women. For Canada, the inclusion of women is crucial for fostering prosperity, achieving sustainable development and creating a lasting peace.

**Nancy Snow** Emeritus Professor, California State University/Fullerton, USA, Pax Mundi Professor of Public Diplomacy, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Japan

Snow focused on addressing feminist foreign policy and the concept of gender diplomacy. In contrast to Canada, the situation in Japan is completely different. Indeed, over the last years, as stated by Prof. Snow, gender inequality has increased in the country, as the Gender Equality Index shows. According to her, increasing and broadening the dialogue is crucial for increasing and implementing gender equality.

Besides this, the speaker mentioned her personal experience of staying in Japan. There, the idea of gender inequality “really hit her in the face” and she realized that the issue is a very prominent one in the country. Indeed, many Japanese female students were leaving to study abroad to try to empower their personalities as women and to see themselves as a changing factor for the future of Japan. As for the meaning of gender diplomacy in this case, this is very much related to the Japanese women moving abroad for studying, working and then becoming successful in international organizations. Japanese women are considered as pioneers of

this concept or as role models in this regard. What clearly emerges from Snow's intervention is the importance of the context in defining the importance and meaning of gender equality.

**Pavλίna Janebová** Deputy Research Director, Association for International Affairs, Czechia

In her intervention Janebová analysed the issue of women's participation in foreign policy from a more practical point of view, focusing on the following question: What specific perspective can women bring to foreign policy?

She said that the expectations of every woman should not be the same, as the history of women in high politics taught us. At the same time, having an equal participation of women is a question of fairness not only in foreign policy but also in other domains. Moreover, according to the speaker, when it comes to inclusion in democracy, it is important to not only take women into account but to look at inclusion as a broader concept. Going on in her intervention, Janebová revealed what the work of the Association for International Affairs related to women's inclusion consists of. If we look, for example, at research on conflicts, it becomes evident that women are unequally affected by economic consequences of international conflicts, sexual violations and other types of gender-based violence, and as such, they should be included in debates in general and particularly expert debates to increase their contribution to changing the narratives of conflicts. Indeed, according to research, not discussing the issue in a context that is diverse enough necessarily leads to leaving some important perspectives out of the discussion and the solutions. This, in turn, contributes to the failure of the solutions.

This is the case, for instance, with the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic as a finding that has emerged from the research is that countries led by women were more efficient in dealing with the pandemic because they do not have to violate gender norms to adopt caution in defensive policies.

**Velina Tchakarova** Head of AIES, Austria

Tchakarova summarized her personal experience as a leader in the field of security in three main points:

- Leadership through the personal role model: the importance of going against the odds, which also encourages the next generation in embracing the field. Showing that it is possible sends the right signal.
- Female leadership through empowerment: women are traditionally long-term thinkers, multitaskers and team builders, which means that in the domain of security and defence policy, where communication is often strictly vertical, female leadership allows for a non-hierarchical structure where all components are being empowered.
- Female leadership based in an emotional intelligence that bring an additional quality to the professional field: women who seek to imitate male leadership in the field often fail because it is not authentic and ignores some basic qualities that are strengths of female leadership and that are typical of women such as compassion and showing empathy. These usually give women an advantage and authenticity when it comes to communication skills – which are very important for the field of security and defence.

When it comes to conflict management all these qualities that are typically associated with women have a crucial role in negotiations and finding compromises to build long-lasting solutions through dialogue.

**Birgit Van Hout** Regional Representative for Europe at UN Human Rights, Belgium

Van Hout started her speech with a provocative thought: despite all that has been said before in the discussion about the positive role of women and their specific contribution to democracy and responses to threats, and even though we are likely to believe that it is true, the evidence supporting this thesis is largely circumstantial and there are also women that are not good leaders – as it happens among men as well.

However, what matters for her is not whether women are better leaders than men; rather it is that despite such concerns, women still have the right to participate and be equally represented simply because they exist. It is often argued in the debate about gender equality that diversity is good for business, but this should not be the point of the discussion since if, following this reasoning, one day women will not be good for business anymore, they will be excluded again.

As such, what Van Hout believes to be crucial in approaching the issue of women's inclusion is approaching it from a human rights perspective given that women's participation should not be a concession or a favour. This is because women's right to participate and be equally represented is their birthright and a part of natural law that has additionally been codified as law internationally. Indeed, equality of women and men was already present in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 70 years ago and throughout the time since then, by signing international treaties on the inclusion of women, states actually contracted legal obligations towards the inclusion of women.

In Van Hout's view, the question should rather be: what can we do to ensure that women can enjoy their right to equality? The answer, according to the speaker, lies in these three examples:

- For decades, the UN has suffered from underrepresentation of women, despite stressing the UN commitment towards gender equality; but with Antonio Gutierrez as Secretary General this has changed through a bottom-up process to identify workable solutions to the issue. This resulted in a Comprehensive Strategy that gave instructions to all UN entities about quantitative targets to meet in due time. The goal has been reached in one year. This example emphasizes the difference that leadership can make in achieving a goal.
- At the national level, the key principle for achieving gender equality is to see women not as victims but as actors and to try to bring about gender justice and structures. The Swedish feminist foreign policy, for example, is based on the 4 Rs: rights, representations, resources and reality; in this way gender equality is fully integrated in every policy area. This example shows the importance of intentionality, concrete guidance, a step-by-step approach and coaching to achieving gender equality.
- G-Qual: a global campaign to improve female representation in international tribunals and monitoring bodies. Only 17% of judges and prosecutors in the field today are women; G-Qual has documented the impact of the lack of women in these positions on international justice. It has also highlighted how this underrepresentation is linked to broader structural discriminations. G-Qual tries to change these trends through advocacy and campaigns with significant results. This highlights the importance of civil mobilization for the achievement of gender equality.

Concluding, Van Hout reflected on two points:

- Women should not try to emulate the model of men's leadership out of fear, since as a result, even in institutions where women are well represented, gender equality can remain ignored. That is why gender equality is not just a matter of gender parity, but it also requires working on organizational culture.
- Women are not a homogeneous group; that is why not all women in the world have succeeded in achieving gender equality. This is the case, for example, with women with disabilities, and some minorities and immigrants are still facing unsurmountable obstacles to their participation and representation.

### **Q&A and Debate**

The debate reflected on the importance of role models and on the significant role that authenticity plays in women's leadership with the function of achieving credibility. Moreover, it has been underlined that whether there is a quota for women's participation should not be the focus of policies on gender equality; indeed what is of crucial importance is having a real goal concerning the inclusion of women. However, the importance of quotas was remarked upon, especially by Snow, as she believes their existence encourages minorities to apply for some positions.

### **15:20-16:20 "Through Participation of All" - Does Democracy, Human Rights and Civil Society Promotion Work for Sustainable Development?**

Chair: **Ondřej Horký-Hlucháň** Senior Researcher, IIR Prague, Czechia

**Kees Biekart** Associate Professor for the Civic Innovation Research Initiative (CIRI), Institute of Social Studies-ISS, The Hague, Netherlands.

Biekart introduced his publication “Research Studies – CSO Participation in the SDGs”. This study consists of an analysis of six countries - Costa Rica, Ghana, Hungary, Lao PDR, Nepal and Tanzania - and their levels of space or freedom for civil participation.

The impact of pandemic restrictions heavily affected the civil public space as the wave of protests happening in the world had to come to a standstill to meet the key protective behaviour standards. Those measures unveiled populist regimes’ power to deprive citizens of the right to civically express themselves, and a further problem is the decisions taken by some countries to deny the Paris Agreement, which indicates that something must be done to protect the environment. On top of this, the rise of censorship and the reduction of funds have massively limited civic participation.

The study focuses on the role of SDG implementation and the importance of the SDGs to society. Summarizing the achievements in this area, the speaker listed the following “headlines”:

- Providing information and raising awareness
- Advocating efforts towards government
- Releasing projects ins many SDG areas
- Rounding up SDG monitoring methods

Notwithstanding, it is crucial in this discussion to analyse some main points, such as the fact that states which inhibit the civic space are defying the essence of SDG 16.10. This undermines the solidarity among CSOs that compete for a positioning towards the SDGs; whereas in a closed space the relationships among them tend to be informal, in open spaces they are formalized, which provides CSOs with a more solid financial basis. It is established by the study that the SDGs did not bring significant changes to the way donors function in regard to CSOs, which generates an endless lack of financial support. Precisely for this reason there was a shift towards private sources funding.

Biekart stressed three main take away points:

1. Involve different types of civil social engagement information about the SDGs in the process, as the lack of such information leads to an exclusion of marginalized groups, such as indigenous groups and women.
2. The worldwide shortage of civil spaces has to be addressed by making clear what is happening and how to support civil freedom during this period
3. Acknowledge the fact that marginalized groups are going to sit at the table only if they are invited by the ones that are already there. This also applies to protest groups.

**Martin Skalský** Chairman of the Association, Arnika, Czechia

Arnika is a Czech NGO that, since 2001, advocates efforts for environmental change. These efforts rest specifically on three pillars:

1. Public participation in decision making regarding environmental issues
2. Nature conservation
3. Toxics, waste and chemical safety

These pillars are explored in the Czech Republic, the Balkan countries and the former USSR countries. When speaking about the related public demonstrations, it is fundamental to mention the environmental movement in the then Czechoslovakia. Its first big public demonstration took place in the 80s as a reaction to the extreme pollution level reached after the implementation of the industrialization plan to revitalize the economy of the then USSR countries. And even after the fall of the communist regime the environmental movement retained its power, which it still has today.

The first international project done by Arnika took place in Armenia in 2020 with the participation of the European Commission. The project was about discovering and identifying the pesticides contaminating the water and soil in the countryside. An additional challenge in this project was that Arnika was a woman-led NGO working in a quite traditional society. Since then Arnika has done similar work, as it works with communities in countrysides and tries to raise awareness of their needs. Skalský said that Arnika noticed that the environment is the common ground that unites all people, even if they are not socially active. When a claim

relates to this subject, it is sure to find support. Also the project in Armenia was basically Arnika's first contact with the social civic life of marginalized groups.

Skalský brought up two other cases with similar results. The first one was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a group of local women tried to keep the village river from being turned into the site of a hydroelectric power plant by blocking the roads with their own bodies. After 500 days of their resisting and some police arrests and violence, they won the case against the company and got to keep the river intact. Those were the same women that later won a local election, which was the first time that women won such an election in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Though their community is still very conservative, this marginalized group achieved political power through environmental engagement.

The second case presented by the expert pertained to Belarus, where the pollution problem was the first issue to lead to a certain social unrest that was accepted by the governmental powers. In this country, there was also an uprising against a local nuclear power plant, which has been heavily advertised during the last decade and has brought people together, which now is another reason for the unravelling on the streets.

The speaker then said that the pandemic has made the entire world more aware of environmental needs and how they influence and contribute to the civic public space. If there is something to notice in this regard, according to Skalský, it is that very often women are the ones behind the related action, and when given support, they are very effective in supporting rights.

## **Q&A and Debate**

*Q: What is a practical recipe for including more groups in political activities and giving the spotlight to deeply marginalized ones?*

**Kees Biekart:** I agree that indeed, not only at rural levels, but also where there is often less attention, that is usually where the change happens. It is very important to recognize this, and also to change the lenses that we use to see things. If you want to know how we can change things, it is by leaving our hotels in the big cities and looking further. We often forget how small our world can be; we need to be more sensitive to the groups we are not connected with and critically look at ourselves to understand the social barriers that we are inserted in. We have to facilitate inclusion, even in these pandemic times. This is our paradox: we are indeed closing ourselves in, but we have never been more connected. We have to include also the younger generation in this because they are the ones making tomorrow's world. The problem is not only a white male predominance, but also that it is the older generation that has the voice, and this has got to change.

*Q: Do you have any observation about the lack of information in the media about the nuclear power plant situation? What could be improved in terms of how people could get information on it?*

**Martin Skalský:** It very much depends on the country. In Belarus it is very hard to find free press media, so social networks are very important, and this is also similar in other countries that haven't got any free press. This also needs to be supported - free media and alternative sources of information. Another thing about Belarus is that there is so much happening there at this moment that this issue was just not the most important.

*Q: If you could elaborate a strategy on how to make cooperation on a civic social level more sustainable, would it be a financial, policy making or tool creating strategy? How can we make civil society open in the most sustainable way?*

**Martin Skalský:** I do not have an answer to how to work in Russia since it is very close to foreign projects. But in Belarus before the revolution, it was possible to articulate positions on the environment since it was not considered a controversial issue, so it was discussed publicly. We build communication channels between the existing groups. The groups there were already close to the people, so we provide them with training, legal assistance and all the necessary tools to professionalise the previous initiative.

**Kees Biekart:** All social change originates in civil society, and this should be established. It is important to keep civil society strong and make sure those groups are supported. The paradox is that when they are financed, they risk being undermined, but if a dependence relation with the donors is generated, the dilemma

is how to support them if not financially. Well maybe by creating coalitions, diminishing social borders, enabling spaces, and granting media time. Rather than only giving them money, we should help them to be sustainable.

*Q: How can civil society help achieve a peaceful commitment between the demands from divergent parts of society?*

**Martin Skalský:** Bosnia was supposed to depend on cold energy power plants, but this is not what happened, as they still import energy, and when people talk about hydro power plants, they should bear in mind that there are no nature protection tools in this regard since the one that existed in the former Yugoslavia does not exist anymore. Instead of saying how power plants should be built, we should say where they could be built instead.

**Kees Biekart:** I think that the question is really how civil society can organize itself to find a peaceful solution. Nevertheless, I was involved in an initiative in the Netherlands called 170 Academics, where we discussed the means to use the current situation to our advantage. Making dramatic changes after the Covid-19 pandemic is necessary. There was an enormous resistance among social groups and the media, followed by major economic impacts, but there was also the chance to rethink our consumption patterns and reduce our traveling, for instance. The economic model that we have lived under has collapsed because it needs to be changed, and we have noticed that on local levels people that had no access to health care systems were helped by the local society, so maybe this is a way out. We should learn also those lessons with the pandemic. It is the opportunity to make a change.

### **15:20-16:20 Moving Towards a Climate-Neutral Economy: The EU/Czech Republic and the 2050 Climate and Energy Framework**

Chair: **Jan Mazač** Junior Associate, IIR Prague, Czechia

In the framework of the Green Deal strategy proposed by the European Commission, the European Union has set its most ambitious target for greenhouse gas emissions. In 2020 the European Parliament voted on and passed a proposal aiming to reduce Europe's emissions by 60% by 2030. In order to respect the engagement each state will have to carry out a fundamental transition in all sectors of its economy. This panel discussed the implications of this transition. It posed the following questions: Are the European states ready and capable of engaging in this economic and political revolution? What position does the Czech Republic hold on this matter and what are the prospects of its development in a decarbonizing Union? How will this transition impact the relations of the EU with its partners?

**Jitka Holubcová** Senior Analyst, NET4GAS, Czechia

The speaker's contribution was constructed around two key points:

- What are the enablers for energy and ecological transition to happen?
- Are European states and especially the Czech Republic ready to dive into this transition?

The Czech Republic is neither an ambitious state nor a frontrunner in the decarbonization process. It ranks 7th in the statistics of EU greenhouse gas emitters. This means that in comparison with other EU member states, it will be a greater challenge for the Czech Republic to adopt an ambitious decarbonization policy without damaging its economy. Moreover, small states like the Czech Republic lack a ministerial staff and associated agencies to process the agenda and elaborate the needed analysis, making it significantly more difficult to be ambitious in regard to the EU agenda. The mindset of the population is also an important element. In some EU states, people are ready for change in this respect and are pushing their political leaders to make such changes. But in the Czech Republic there is still work to be done to help people become more aware, to help them make better choices and to encourage their government to take concrete actions in this regard.

On the European level, since the Paris Agreement the EU has gone through a deep revision of certain policies, such as the energy policy. There is now a strategy, a road plan in this regard. There are even proposals of binding rules on the table.

*“I dare to say we are a world leader in this respect; we are politically set.”*

As for technological readiness, we do not have all the solutions to the problem of meeting our need of a future decarbonized economy yet. The hydrogen production technologies are either non-existent or face problems in terms of price, efficiency and capacity. Such issues need to be tackled via international cooperation and the Czech Republic takes a good part in this discussion. This transition provides an opportunity for growth, but investments are needed. To meet the 2030 target, the Commission estimates that we will need an additional 260 billion euros in annual investment, which represents 1.5 % of the EU GDP in 2015. However, what must be kept in mind is the disparities among EU states in terms of GDP per capita. The Czech Republic is in the 18th place in the GDP per capita ranking, which is way below the European average. The Czech government is thus less inclined to work and invest to meet these goals. The European Commission declared that technologies, sustainable solutions and disruptive innovation are critical for achieving the objective of the European Green Deal. Such a statement is more critical than we tend to understand.

Holubcová concluded her intervention by underlining that the Czech Republic has to bring new ideas from its international relations to this area, and be ready to rethink its use of energy, reduce its consumption and make different consumer choices.

**Philipp Wendel** Head of the Unit “Energy Transition” at the Federal Foreign Office, Germany

The European Parliament has just voted to lower European greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2030, thus raising the target. The related negotiations with member states have then begun, which will hopefully lead to an ambitious plan. According to Wendel the goal here is to reach carbon neutrality in the EU by 2050. In Germany, renewables account for 52% of the power sector. We have the necessary technology to entirely decarbonise the power sector, and given the cooperation between EU member states, this goal is achievable. It requires investment and infrastructure. With hydraulic power, and onshore and offshore wind power, there is potential in this respect all across Europe, although it will be more challenging in other sectors. For transportation, there are several options. For individual transportation, the key will necessarily be electric power. But in transportation of heavy loads such as freight, industrial transportation and long distance transportation, hydrogen will be dominant. In the industrial sector, there are already plans to invest in hydrogen power. The technology exists but the regulatory framework that would allow it to function isn't set yet. When it comes to heating, there are different options such as long-distance heating for urban areas or heat pumps for countryside. With the European Green Deal, the Commission has shown it is ready to rule in favour of massive investments. However, in the end most decisions regarding the power mix will have to be taken on the national level.

Renewable energies are still too expensive, but with the necessary investments, their prices will drop. For instance, the price of wind energy has significantly decreased in the past decade. Renewables are now becoming competitive with other sources of energy in most regions of the world (definitely in Germany). It is also important to have the right regulatory framework. A good example is the decision of Germany to start CO<sub>2</sub> pricing in all sectors starting in 2021. Tax disincentives for fossil investments are also a viable option. Besides this, there is an ongoing debate regarding certain border regulations which must be compatible with WTO regulations in order to ensure that our industry remains competitive.

Regarding the current German Council presidency, no major legislation proposal has been put on the table so far. However, the German Ministry of Economy and Energy has hosted an energy ministers' meeting and an important hydrogen conference, and there will be an energy ministers' council later this year. Wendel is hopeful that this will pave the way for future presidencies, for the European Green Deal and for the next COP in the UK.

**Zbyněk Dubský** Assistant Professor, University of Economics, Prague, Czechia

Dubský presented his views on the future of geopolitics for the EU. His intervention was based on two key subjects:

- The EU Green Deal and external relations
- An analysis of the new international order for energy and of the role of EU

Since the industrial revolution, the geopolitics of energy have been a driving factor in national and international global prosperity and security. But in the last decade renewables overcame their technological and financial barrier and are now challenging fossil fuel on the energy market. BP became the first oil producer to capitulate to this new reality by announcing its intention to cut oil and gas production by 30 to 40% in the next decade and re-allocate assets towards green energy.

The EU imports 55% of its energy, and this creates dependencies. But the EU is also a champion of decarbonization. Thus, the energy politics will become more complex than it used to be. Importers and exporters have used energy as a foreign policy lever. But as the importance of oil and gas decreases, we can expect energy alliances built on fossil fuel to weaken.

Will the EU benefit or lose due to these changes? Oil and gas reserves are highly concentrated in certain parts of the world. Five countries account for 60% of the total reserves. Sources of renewables, on the other hand, are less geographically concentrated. Hence, certain strategic choke points will become less important. A decarbonated EU will continue to import wood or diesel, but it will be a small part of our consumption. We could also import electricity from countries which can produce cheaper renewable power like the sunny region of North Africa.

Besides this, we can expect our old partners such as Russia and Norway to play a new role. Today, most Russian gas exports are sold to the EU. Hydrogen is and will be the lowest carbon producing energy source for Norway and Russia. Therefore, even a green EU will likely keep importing energy from these partners. At first, it will be hydrogen made from natural gas (with low carbon emissions), but eventually, it should become green hydrogen made by using green electricity.

Dubský argued that decarbonization gives the EU an opportunity to become a game changer in international politics. It has the potential to strengthen the Union's economic position by protecting the internal market and saving it from fossil fuel imports. The EU expects to reduce its annual expenditure for fossil fuel imports by 266 billion Euros. Fossil fuel demand is expected to decline by 61 % from 2018 to 2040, and gas demand by 38% from 2018 to 2050. But the gas imports are expected to increase in the short term as domestic production will decline and local power plants will close.

The most important proposal of the European Green Deal for our partners is the idea of implementing a carbon border adjustment mechanism, and a special new tax on imported goods based on their carbon emissions. This is an interesting proposal which can create many problems, depending on how it is implemented and how it will be accepted by our partners.

Energy remains an important element of cooperation with our partners. But it will no longer be necessarily based on a simple supplier-consumer relation. The EU can participate in the transformation of its partners in the energy sector by combining financial instruments and expertise. With the implementation of the Green Deal's regional frame and its expansion towards its partners, the EU is in the position of a normative power in the international system. It will most likely be the first power to achieve carbon neutrality. In this manner, the European Union sets rules on what is correct and normal. The opportunity for the EU to strengthen its position in the world is associated with many risks. With such ambitious objectives, its position will be weakened especially financially, as others will gain a competitive advantage through the retreat from fossil fuel. The new green world creates new inter-dependencies. Exporters and importers will always be part the complex web, which always tends to be misused as a geopolitical weapon.

**Jan Mazač** Junior Associate, IIR Prague, Czechia

The presentation of Mazač was devoted to transatlantic energy relations and the differences between Donald Trump and Joe Biden's positions on environmental issues.

The energy dependency of the EU in the area of gas is important. The growing energy trade can be considered as an insurance policy against threats. The EU secures its supplies through diversification. As confirmed by Frans Timmermans, the European Commission Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, natural gas will continue to play a key role in the transition, at least temporarily, and in the process of replacing coal power plants by building, for instance, new hydrogen infrastructure. Synthetic energy might be imported to the EU using existing terminals, which could be upgraded to transport hydrogen produced outside of the EU. The EU's LNG (liquefied natural gas) imports from the US have increased after the Trump-Juncker

agreement in 2018. In March 2020, the US became the largest supplier of LNG to the EU, even surpassing Qatar in this regard. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the US has lost its leadership in the region. From an economic standpoint, it was logical to import gas from the US, as it used to be competitive. Today the situation has changed, as European gas has repeatedly hit lower prices than its American counterpart.

What outcome will the US elections have? To answer this question, Mazač described the positions each candidate had taken in the past. Joe Biden recognised the green deal of the Democrats as fundamental, and his objective is to achieve carbon neutrality by mid-century. He pledged to decarbonise the US electricity by 2035, and to install thousands of wind turbines and solar panels, and promised to double offshore wind by the next decade. He wants to invest up to 1.7 trillion USD in clean energy and environmental justice in the next decade, which would be a historic investment. However, it must be underlined that Biden and Obama engaged in the largest fracking campaign on US lands as well as the largest oil and gas production in US history. The Obama administration also lifted a ban on crude oil export in 2015.

As for Donald Trump, his key policy is one of energy independence and dominance. The US has increased its export of LNG to the whole global market under his presidency. He withdrew from several binding accords and has imposed strong sanctions on unfriendly oil exporters such as Venezuela or Iran. He lifted numerous environmental restrictions in the US and authorised the construction of new pipelines. Regarding the European market, the US seeks to limit competition. The Trump administration is openly opposed to the construction of the Nord Stream and TurkStream pipelines. He does not have any explicit climate plan, but he has passed some environmental directives here and there, like the ban on offshore drilling in Florida.

Climate change is an issue that has to be addressed internationally. However, both US and EU steps in the related transition on the world stage will be restrained by national politics. Thus, there is no certainty that if Joe Biden wins the election both sides of the Atlantic will be pursuing a common climate goal.

### **Q&A and Debate**

*Q: What are the key climate policy agenda Germany should push forward during its presidency of the European Council?*

**Philipp Wendel:** There are only two months left, but Germany is convinced hydrogen will play a crucial role in the transportation, industry and heating sectors. We hope to be soon able to scale up the global market for hydrogen. Since I work for the Foreign Office, I also wanted to underline that it is not our goal to become totally independent from our partners outside Europe. We think energy has a key role to play in improving the relations between countries. Energy relations are often mutual dependencies, and it is in the interest of security policy and diplomacy. Europe is now importing a large quantity of fossil fuel and we hope that it will be replaced by other sources of energy.

*Q: Do we need to massively invest in nuclear power as the current most efficient non-CO<sub>2</sub>-emitting energy?*

**Philipp Wendel:** Speaking as a representative of the German government, Germany has decided to phase out nuclear energy. We think nuclear energy is not a sustainable and secure source of energy. If you look at the recent statistics, it is also not competitive. Investing in new nuclear power plants is very costly and if we compare their power generation costs, it is by far more expensive to invest in nuclear energy. I do not think nuclear energy has a big role to play in the future. We will probably see some nuclear plant still functioning to provide some base load capacity. But when it comes to new investments, I believe there is an important risk that those investments might end up as stranded assets in the future.

**Jitka Holubcová:** I tend to agree that investments in nuclear power plants might be too costly in today's world with more sources coming in and with decarbonisation. But in the end, this will be left to the discretion of the member states. I cannot speak for the Czech State; the investments will be carried out anyway, but I agree that there are severe risks that these will turn out to be stranded assets. As for the safety of nuclear power plants, my opinion is that these power plants are quite safe.

*Q: You mentioned that the government is going to invest in hydrogen. I would like to ask which technology might help with the flexibility and stability of our future energy system, based on the large amount of intermittent renewable energy sources.*

**Philipp Wendel:** I expect that in the end we will have a mix of technologies. If we connect our grids in a smart way and we invest in renewables across Europe, I am confident that there will always be wind farms with heavy wind flowing; there will always be sunshine in some parts of Europe. We can always counterbalance the fluidity of renewables. Secondly, the further we go offshore, the more secure our wind base load is. And there are significant developments in wind farm technology such as floating platforms. There will be storage capacities, not only batteries, but also water. In a dam, water can be pumped during the day and used in the evening. Then of course hydrogen would play a major role for most of the sectors, though not necessarily for the power sector. The German example shows that having a large percentage of renewables in the power grid is doable and doesn't lead to uncertainty. We expect to see in the few decades to come a need for natural gas. This is why we are still investing in gas pipelines, but only as an interim period. At some point, as we reach carbon neutrality, gas will need to be replaced 100 % by other sources of energy.

## **16:30-16:40 CLOSING REMARKS**

**Alica Kizeková** Program Coordinator, Senior Researcher, IIR Prague, Czechia

The coordinator of the Symposium began her closing remarks by thanking all the participants and specifically the panellists for exploring the topics of the 12th International Symposium on the Czech Foreign Policy "Building Sustainable Connections" with a multi-spectral and cross-disciplinary perspective. Throughout the panels and their respective discussions, many long-term solutions were proposed.

An important conclusion arising from these panels is that we are generally not taking sufficient advantage of our local collaborations, projects and initiatives. From a European point of view there is sometimes a lack of exchange in the eastern-western relations preventing us from understanding each other's positions. But today, we saw reassuring comments on how initiatives from each side can become positive contributions.

Another important point, which was underlined in several presentations, is the fact that many of the issues we face today existed before the current Covid-19 crisis. Even though verbal expressions of these tensions have increased, there are significant efforts in the international community to set differences aside and try to collaborate. For instance, some speakers mentioned that the funding provided by the European Union in different regions is welcome and necessary but may require more communication for locals to be aware of it.

The audience seemed curious about the subject of female role models and women's representation, and how it can be used in post-conflict areas or in conservative regions where there are issues with the representation of genders. This is an important topic to discuss, specifically since our views may vary depending on where we live and where we come from.

The theme of propaganda and the potential harmful use of information and of social media has also been explored. Today more than ever, we need to select the information we get in order to block or control harmful and negative content. In this discussion, we have to include the young generation, who use these technologies in their studies as well as in their private lives. We tend to take for granted our access to information via the Internet. Several panellists pointed out that in their geographic areas of study, access to these tools might often be limited either by technology or by censorship. Hence, when proposing solutions for these regions it is important to engage with experts, people who speak the region's language and the local community. These are only some of the topics discussed throughout this symposium.

Finally, Kizeková concluded by inviting all the participants and partners who would like to participate in or make recommendations for the 13th Symposium on Czech Foreign Policy next year, to contact the IIR.

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Approved by Dr Alica Kizeková, the Symposium Program Coordinator

We would like to thank the IIR interns who took notes during the panel discussions.