

# Removing Barriers, Promoting Responsibility

## The Czech Centre-Right's Solutions to the Political Challenges of 2021

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## Project Partners

**TOPAZ** was established in 2012 as an educational platform and think tank associated with the political party TOP 09. Its goal is to open up discussion with the public concerning conservative ideas. Its main activities are focused on social debates with independent experts, cooperation with TOP 09 expert committees, fundraising, presentation of alternative views on the work of public authorities and preparation of analytical and conceptual policy documents suggesting alternative answers.

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## Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
ACT	Access to COVID-19 Tools
AFET	European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CFP	Czech Foreign Policy
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ECB	European Central Bank
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EIB	European Investment Bank
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
ETS	Emission Trading System
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GP	General Practitioner
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Islamic State
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NATO	North Atlantic Alliance
ND	New Democracy
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NHS	National Health Service



PiS	Law and Justice
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
SDGs	Sustainable Goals for Development
SEPA	Single European Payment Area
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPD	Freedom and Direct Democracy
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument
UK	United Kingdom
V4	Visegrad 4
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Introduction

*Lucie Tungul*

The year 2020 will become one of defining moments for societies across the globe, including Europe and Czechia. The coronavirus crisis revealed the weaknesses of national economies, political and party systems, the education systems, healthcare systems, labour markets, generational conflicts and also the weaknesses of the European integration process and its fragility, mostly visible in the operations of the single market and the Schengen area. The crisis reinforced the conflicts on all levels of societies and also the extent to which our well-being depends on others. While it has revealed these more or less hidden/visible weaknesses, it has not resolved any of the long-term issues; in many cases it actually reinforced them.

We are consequently facing a situation involving a changing global paradigm, which takes place every time when ‘the dominant paradigm under which normal science operates is rendered incompatible with new phenomena, facilitating the adoption of a new theory or paradigm’ (Kuhn 1962). Changing the paradigm requires a change in our thinking, this having been apparent on the global level e.g., after the world wars, with the end of the Cold War and after the attacks of September 11. The nature of the current change is not clear yet but there is no doubt that those, who will accommodate to it quickly, will become the winners. Those insisting on return to the ‘good old times’ (no matter how much we might think that they were better than what is awaiting us) will lose precious time in preparations for the future. It does not matter how good we had been in the old world (think about the stars of the silent film era and the introduction of ‘talkies’), the future is what matters and how we handle the transition to the new paradigm (Barker 1993). The current coronavirus crisis has placed a momentous change in front of us, shaking up entire societies and with an end nowhere in sight at this point. This increases insecurity and, therefore, the fragility of the entire system.

Not only did the pandemic crisis impact the entire world, but the same can be said about climate change or about developments in the European Union’s neighbourhood, including Belarus and Turkey. These developments indicate the importance of promoting a responsible approach to national and international politics. The current situation is critical and threatens to seriously destabilise liberal democracies and social market economies. It is also, however, an opportunity, a unique moment to promote new approaches and methods that will enable us to develop a better quality of life based on responsibility to ourselves, our environment and to all generations. Responsibility does not mean that we know better than others what should be done, but it is the ability to unite society, reinforce

solidarity, local, regional and global connections. All of this builds on the belief that our decisions and behaviour have far-reaching consequences. The ability to unite is built on the support and cultivation of dialogue, with all of the protagonists working at establishing an inclusive and responsible society and rejecting all those forces that disable such a dialogue or abuse it for their particular interests. As the paradigm change has shaken the entire established system, long-term stable values have become key as they serve as the basis for short-, medium-, and long-term political goals that can restore security to society and guarantee the subsistence of the system while avoiding a slide towards some form of authoritarianism, particularism and aggression.

This publication addresses several extremely important issues related to the current Czech and European experience. Ladislav Cabada analyses the long-term direction of Czech foreign policy and its main trends with a special emphasis on the post-2013 period; he calls for an increased emphasis on human rights and support for democracy, that is, an ethical foreign policy. Pavel Havlíček discusses one traditional aspect of Czech foreign policy, the EU's Eastern Partnership, and its outlook for the post-2020 era. He emphasises the importance of Visegrad cooperation for the development of the countries in the region. Olaf Wientzek focuses on the EU and the impact of Covid-19 with respect to its relations with USA and China, that is, the wider international arena. He mentions the importance of multilateralism and transatlantic cooperation, but also the need to reform the EU in order to support its recovery and future strength *vis-à-vis* its allies and enemies.

The Covid-19 crisis has fully revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the healthcare system. Pavel Hroboň presents his proposal for reforms on the Czech level, addressing the full complexity of care provision, which would make the system more efficient while guaranteeing its accessibility. Media freedom, analysed by Viktória Jančošíková, is another area where the Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated substantial weaknesses. She concludes that the crisis contributed to the ongoing destruction of media freedom in Central Europe (and further to the East) and endorses a stronger legislative framework ensuring media freedom and protection from political and economic influence; taking into account the specifics of the post-communist region. The following chapter discusses a different aspect of this problem, when Jonáš Syrovátka discusses the so-called *information disorder* and the related threats to our security. He views cooperation between state institutions, civic society, private businesses and the media as an answer to this problem.

The remaining chapters address the long-term problems of Czech and European societies. Otto Eibl focuses on segmentation and election campaigns, identifying one shared problem, this being that most Czech political parties lack courage and leadership in their top ranks. Lucie Tungul analyses the integration of Muslim migrants. She argues that the Czech integration policy is built on an extremely vague idea as to what Czech society considers successful integration and what it expects from

migrants. She suggests involving the general public and migrants into a wider social debate about the goals of integration and focusing on the tangible threats and traps that migration entails.

Climate change is another key element that has been changing the paradigm of our lives. The European Green Deal, adopted in 2020, brings with it many fears, not only for large businesses but also for small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). Eva Palacková labels the SMEs ‘pillars’ of sustainable recovery under the condition that they will have access to consultancy and financial resources in order to fund the transition and if the red tape linked to funding the transition to more environmentally friendly approaches is reduced. The last chapter by Jaromír Hurník, Zdeněk Tůma and David Vávra discusses the topic of adopting the euro, which is, like migration and climate change, defined in Czechia more by emotions than rationality. They present the essential arguments for and against joining the eurozone. Using theoretical and empirical arguments, they highlight the fact that we cannot find one definitive answer but that the current debate is both confused and confusing and often leads to unrealistic expectations. Improving the public debate about these topics is essential for establishing the correct parameters of the inevitable transition, the further postponement of which will most likely only increase the future costs. It is also important to understand that involving experts does not lead to one definitive answer but provides a wide range of opinions and recommendations. Only based on discussion can we come to an adequate choice of strategies when preparing for the upcoming and inevitable paradigm shift.

Climate change and the changing balance of powers in the international arena have led to discussions about how the world as we know it is disappearing. The Covid-19 crisis has accelerated the transition and deflected certain changes in a less expected direction but has also shown that people and entire societies are capable of a radical change in behaviour and expectations. The fundamental element is the ability to adapt. In order to do so, we need stable values, which provide some security in insecure times and a defence against extremes, together with information and the resourcefulness to act. All the chapters in this publication indicate possible reform paths and fundamental decisions, point out possible challenges and suggest ways to remove or minimize them while acknowledging that our information is incomplete. Every decision involves a risk and every individual and society should bear their share of the responsibility.

# The Human Rights Aspects of Czech Foreign Policy- - A Change of Course after 2013 and Future Challenges

*Ladislav Cabada*

**Abstract:** In the wake of 1989, Czech foreign policy has since gained a global reputation, due to a strong inclination to ethical foreign policy with a particular accent on the protection of human rights, democracy, and justice. President Václav Havel was a major figure representing this approach; however, the list of its proponents contains more than a few names. The year 2010, and even more importantly 2013, were breaking points marking the beginning of the annihilation of the concept by key institutions (the president and the government) and, likewise, attempts at its modification, which eventually had a weakening effect on some of the policy's pillars (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Lubomír Zaorálek). The change of orientation towards small country policy focused on economic diplomacy and setting up pragmatic coalitions, including negative ones (the Visegrad group within EU) is even more prominent with the government of Andrej Babiš, which has opened the door to the establishment of a duopoly endorsing 'interest' over values in foreign policy. Despite that, the present analysis shows that ethical foreign policy is a vital concept at the parliamentary level — the Senate in particular, and at the level of local administrations, amounting to an alternative discourse not only for the present day but also with regard to potential future executive leaders.

**Keywords:** Czechia, Ethical Foreign Policy, Human Rights, Paradiplomacy, Opposition

## *Introduction*

In 2012, Šárka Waisová summarised the conclusions of her analysis of the development of Czech foreign policy (hereinafter referred to as 'CFP') in the two decades following 1989 and her tone was optimistic: Czechia had successfully integrated into the Western democratic communities. Her work *The Burden of Choice: Czech Foreign Policy between Principles and Interests* draws on the thesis that CFP abandoned a substantively defined national interest to be able to shift towards ethical foreign policy (Waisová 2012: 165). Confronting the approaches of the pragmatic 'Realpolitik' and ethical foreign policy, she had analytically proved that regarding goals, means, resources, and motivations of action, the logic of action and legitimisation strategies, CFP inclines towards ethically oriented foreign policy (Waisová 2012: 168).

Furthermore, she stated that the nature of CFP can be better described as ethical, *i.e.*, as a policy in which national interests mostly correspond to ethical principles rather than diverge from them (Waisová 2012: 167). Subsequent analyses carried out by Waisová, in collaboration with Linda Piknerová and the author of the present study, exposed the importance of the role played by representatives of the anti-communist dissent in setting the ethical agenda within CFP. Furthermore, the analyses indicated a considerable influence of the former dissent community on CFP, not only on the executive level — government (specifically the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the President — but also on the parliamentary level (Waisová and Piknerová 2012; Cabada and Waisová 2011).

Confronting the above-presented conclusions of extensive research with the current political reality is undoubtedly dramatic, clearly illustrating that the election earthquake in 2010, especially 2013, and 2017, not only saw the emergence of new political subjects on the scene but also different preferences in significant policies. The changes in approaches and priorities are most visible in the field of foreign policy, which is undoubtedly related both to the strong anti-EU and pro-Russian orientation of successors of Václav Havel in the post of Czech President, as well as to the fact that a significant number of the Czech political representatives continue to perceive the European Union as an external player against whom the national interest (not necessarily clearly defined) needs to be advocated.

The third crucial moment in the change of course is the preference of pragmatic foreign policy focused on immediate and isolated goals. The situation is, to a certain extent, also the result of a strong tendency for featureless foreign policy which accentuates particular goals in external partners: President Miloš Zeman thus formulates his foreign policy stance with a strong accent on the interests of Russia and the People's Republic of China. A critical perspective must also be applied to the recurrent subordination of CFP to two nationalist-conservative regimes which disrespect the concept of liberal democracy and human rights: Viktor Orbán's Hungary and Jarosław Kaczyński's Poland.

In that matter, we can only regret the fact that the Czech government has wasted the potential to proactively develop other formats of Central European cooperation, whether bilateral (primarily with Germany, but possibly also with Slovakia and Austria) or multilateral. The attempt to build a value-oriented Slavkov triangle counterpoint to the national-conservative, populist, and anti-EU rhetoric of the Visegrad Group, often led by the Orbán and Kaczyński duo, disappeared off the table with the instalment of new government leadership in Czechia and participation of FPÖ in the Austrian coalition government in 2017 (Cabada 2018).

In the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, CFP further developed a strong human rights ethos of anti-communist dissent, promoting the idea of the protection of basic human rights at large, both rhetorically and in diplomatic action, in line with the fact that a list of specific human

rights part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1945 and 1948, and as such it is expanded on regular basis. President Havel, leading Czech diplomats as well as ministerial offices established for the specific purpose (the Department of Human Rights and Transformation Policy and the Department of Third Countries Collaboration), NGOs, and other agents of CFP set the agenda of human rights in non-democratic countries, the most criticised regimes being the People's Republic of China (Tibet), Myanmar, Cuba, and Belarus. The voice of CFP was equally strong in the post-Soviet and the post-Yugoslav regions. The reconciliatory agenda towards Germany (the 1997 Czech-German declaration) and Bavaria (under Petr Nečas's government) is also not to be forgotten.

Even though they are hardly heard of in the media, it is with satisfaction we may state that many of the above-mentioned activities are still ongoing today. On the other hand, it is obvious that as of 2013 the role of Czechia, considered both from the inner and the outer perspectives, has evolved from one of a moral authority and role model into a small pragmatic country submitting its foreign policy to the interests of the superpowers of Russia and the People's Republic of China, and pleading for the right of veto in the EU, mostly in situations when quite paradoxically a common European human rights approach is being negotiated.

### ***Motivation behind the Change of Principles of CFP***

Should we address the causes behind the change in the basic philosophy of the CFP after 2013 and can we observe different strategies of its key actors? Analysts agree that the key players in the change are, on the one hand, President Zeman, who took office after the first direct election of the head of state on March 8, 2013, and, on the other part of the spectrum, foreign minister Lubomír Zaorálek and his first deputy Petr Drulák, who assumed their respective offices after the elections in October 2013 (to be more specific, with the appointment of the government of Bohuslav Sobotka at the end of January 2014). Let us now scrutinise the motivations of these key actors in more detail.

As for President Zeman, a clear reason behind the change in the foreign policy narrative is his ideological support of two key actors, who have massively violated human rights in their own countries, in the People's Republic of China and Russia. The possible motives for the president's pro-Russian and pro-Chinese position are diverse, from ideological (with regard to China, he believes that the country can be viewed as an example of stabilisation of society worth emulating; his stance towards Russia is marked with ever stronger national Pan-Slavic tendencies, similar to his predecessor, Václav Klaus Sr.) to economic; analyses of the financing of the second presidential campaign in 2017/2018 indicate a strong connection to resources of Russian origins (Hradilková and Bártová 2018). In respect to

China, the president may seriously have believed that this global superpower could significantly help the Czech economy; however, we cannot fail to notice the peculiar and non-transparent relations of the presidential office to the PPF group, a business company with significant economic interest in China. Last, but not least, personal and staff-related reasons cannot be overlooked, in particular the influence of certain pro-Russian actors led by the head of the presidential advisers, Martin Nejedlý, and businessman Zdeněk Zbytek, as well as the pro-China lobby, led by Jaroslav Tvrdík<sup>1</sup>. The change in the character of Miloš Zeman could not pass unnoticed either; the former liberal and social democrat has gradually assumed a national-conservative authoritarian stance, joining the club of Orbán, Kaczyński, Netanyahu, perhaps even Putin and Xi Jinping.

At the same time, the inconsistency in the president's views are obvious. In refusing to support Tibet, he describes its pre-modern regime as feudal, with aspects of slave theocracy. He calls for the protection of Christian values while preaching against immigration, omitting the fact that Europe is a former feudal theocracy too. The president opposes any interference in the politics of other states, but at the same time expresses his understanding for the Russian occupation of Crimea or South Ossetia. He actively declares his support to some political figures (such as the representative of the radical right-wing Freedom Party of Austria, Norbert Hofer), but denounces others. For example, he recently criticised the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA for being racist, under extremely inappropriate circumstances at the US Embassy in Prague on the occasion of the Independence Day celebrations (Novinky.cz 2020).

Essentially, whatever the motives, President Zeman has taken a sharp turn from ethical and human rights protection within the framework of CFP. Considering the change of attitude at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the motivation and argumentation of the main proponents of the deviation from the human rights policy in Havel's style was anchored in the belief that a confrontational nature and imperial undertones hinder dialogue between the 'Western' supporters of the human rights agendas and the criticised parties. Drulák's critical stance towards NATO's concept of the 'humanitarian bombing' of Serbia and Montenegro in the spring of 1999 is legitimate, similar to his critical view of Havel's inclination towards the policy of George W. Bush in the war on terrorism, mostly a fabricated concept legitimising the attack on the Hussein regime in Iraq.

On the other hand, Drulák's argument that China perceives criticism of its actions in Tibet as condescending behaviour from the West and an effort to 'keep weak China down on earth' (Šafaříková 2014) appears problematic from our current perspective, especially with regard to China's assertive

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<sup>1</sup> Tvrdík was the Minister of Defense in 2001-2003, director of the Czech Airlines, and subsequently began to build business relations with China: since 2012, he chaired the supervisory board of the Joint Czech-Chinese Chamber of Mutual Cooperation, and since 2015 he has been the deputy chairman of the Board of Directors of CEFC, a body directly connected to the Chinese Government. Tvrdík is clearly a key player in building ties between president Zeman and China.



behaviour both in the global context (the geopolitical and geo-economic settlement in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe within the 17+1 Platform which brings together China and seventeen Central and Eastern Europe countries around the Belt and Road project, the ‘New Silk Road’) and with respect to China’s interior affairs (dismantling democratic government frameworks in Hong Kong, and the regime’s brutal behaviour towards the Uighur minority). For the sake of context, in 2014 Drulák proposed the modification of the human rights agenda of CFP by dismissing the ‘imperial’ elements and supplementing them with social rights, while in 2020 he expresses the belief that CFP should completely resign its human rights agenda, as it is about nothing but ‘our own moral exhibitionism’, a stance which does not resonate in Czech society (Břešťan 2020).

Czech liberal-conservative, centre-right, political representation viewed Drulák’s work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an inclination towards China, and criticism from the part of Prime Minister Sobotka was also reported. Drulák eventually resigned as first deputy and was subsequently sent to France as an ambassador in 2016. However, it can be stated that the stance of former foreign minister Zaorálek also manifested aspects of a tendency for more ‘balance’ between the ethical and the pragmatic in foreign policy. After all, he was one of the agents in the infamous case of the Pro-China Declaration of Four, a proclamation signed by President Zeman, Prime Minister Sobotka and the Presidents of both Chambers of Parliament, Jan Hamáček and Milan Štěch respectively, in which they responded to a meeting of the then Minister of Culture Daniel Herman and other Czech liberal-conservative politicians with the Tibetan Dalai Lama, in October 2016.

Written in a reverential tone towards Chinese representation, the declaration foregrounded the benefits of Czech-Chinese collaboration and explicitly endorsed the One-China policy, and as such was denounced by critics as ‘cowardly’ (President of the Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies Karel Schwarzenberg) or as rewriting the post-1989 human rights ethos with a pragmatic narrative (President of the Constitutional Court Pavel Rychetský). It is nonetheless important to mention that under Zaorálek’s leadership the new Human Rights Support and Transformational Cooperation was adopted in September 2015, one in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs endorsed humanistic values and the tradition of human rights support policy as shaped by Jan Amos Komenský, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Václav Havel and Jiří Dienstbier senior as well as key principles of ethical foreign policy. Likewise, the initiative of Prime Minister Sobotka and Minister Zaorálek leading to the creation of the Slavkov Triangle format, an intergovernmental cooperation between Czechia, Austria, and Slovakia, was a clear declaration of the efforts to maintain the human rights agenda in foreign policy on the table.

On the contrary, Sobotka’s government’s evasive rhetoric around the Ukrainian events of 2013 and 2014 can hardly pass unnoticed (the pro-European motivated revolt against President Viktor

Yanukovych's regime and his dependence on Russia, the Russian occupation of Crimea, the Russian hybrid war in Eastern Ukraine). In the end, the then President of the Foreign Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, Karel Schwarzenberg, became the highest ranking political figure to visit Ukraine and support the pro-democratic revolution.

The above stated indicates that within the context of a vaguely and inconsistently formulated CFP, the human rights agenda was not abandoned completely after 2013. However, the political authorities with most media coverage — that is the president and the government — adopted a clearly positive stance towards the pragmatic and economic dimension of diplomacy and began to neglect or even explicitly disrespect human rights. Having said that, the final part of the analysis will try to present a more optimistic picture than that offered by current media as well as more informed analyses reflecting the efforts to 'erase' Havel's legacy in CFP and the 'final' turn to the pro-Russian, pro-Chinese, and nativist policy ('Strong Czechia' as was emblazoned on Andrej Babiš's red cap, copying Donald Trump's PR accoutrement, before the elections to the European Parliament in 2019) (Fendrych 2020b; Valášek and Truchlá 2020).

### ***The Human Rights Agenda in CFP in 2020, or 'Islands of Positive Deviation'***

The above-mentioned plurality in attitudes of CFP representatives, as well as in the number of players in the field, is evidently a considerable burden as it makes it impossible for external parties, both partners within the EU and other regions, to make sense of Czech foreign policy positions. There is no doubt that the media and public image of Czechia in the countries of the core of the EU have been far from optimal in recent years. Czechia is quite naturally, still considered in a better light than Poland and Hungary, but a number of aspects have classified it among the untouchables, sometimes nicknamed the 'Big, Bad Visegrad' or 'The Dark Heart of Europe': among them are controversies around conflicts of interest surrounding Prime Minister Andrej Babiš as well as his numerous anti-EU and nativist statements primarily aimed at his domestic supporters, and the often irrational support of the Hungarian and Polish positions. At the same time, however, the plurality of attitudes within the foreign policy discourse suggests that ethical foreign policy has not been completely abandoned and that a change of president and/or government could bring a change in the official course relatively easily. Therefore, in conclusion, I will present several specific activities which are associated with the search for, and the promotion of, a human rights agenda and ethical policy in a broader sense within CFP.

The first relevant example is the paradiplomatic activities of the new leadership of Prague, represented by the city mayor Zdeněk Hřib and a coalition of multiple political subjects with a strong

liberal-conservative representation. Prague's diplomatic agenda manifested itself first and foremost in quitting the collaboration partnership with Beijing, and the promotion of a partnership with Taiwan and its capital Taipei. The second significant example is the partnership of mayors of the capital cities of the Visegrad Group countries, who jointly speak against the national-conservative and populist trends in the highest political ranks of their states. The Free Cities Pact signed by the mayors of Bratislava, Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw in mid-December 2019 emphasised the effort to show the better, more liberal face of Visegrad (Ehl 2019). In both cases mentioned above, I consider it important from the perspective of liberal-conservative politics that an agreement has been reached repeatedly with liberals of the 'non-conservative' type, *i.e.*, the Czech Pirate Party, even more so as the agreement concerns one of the key political domains.

Another important example of the ethical and human rights agenda in CFP is the joint text of foreign minister Tomáš Petříček and his predecessors in office, Schwarzenberg and Zaorálek, in May 2020, wherein they spoke critically against the US-Israel (in this case understood as Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu) plan to annex territories which, according to international conventions, are a presumed part of the independent State of Palestine. In addition to international law, the human rights of the Palestinians or Israeli Arabs are highlighted by the three political representatives in unison.

The defence of human rights almost cost Petříček a place in the government, as both Prime Minister Babiš and President Zeman strongly opposed him. The critics' main argument was that Petříček's stance was anti-Israel, and as such had a disruptive effect on Czech relations with the United States and Israel (for example, President Zeman and Alexandr Vondra came to a rare agreement, demonstrating the geopolitically and culturally fundamentalist thinking of national conservatives). The author of the present text would add that Petříček's attitude may be disruptive with regard to relations with those sections of the American and Israeli public who support their populist leaders, the truth being that both countries are democracies, there are large communities in both of them who oppose President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Currently, minister Petříček can be considered overall the most prominent representative of the executive branch who tends to balance Czech particular interests with more general and value-based ethical foreign policy assumptions. Under his leadership, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs completed the candidate process to the UN Human Rights Committee for the period 2019-2021, following the election of the country among the members in 2018. In Babiš's administration, Petříček's voice (occasionally with that of Zaorálek) is probably the loudest in expressing concerns about the growing influence and pressure from Russia and China.

In line with his general stance, Petříček commissioned an analysis of the changes the world is

going through during the Covid-19 crisis in the spring of 2020. An internal document, the general framework of which was presented to the public by the media (Valášek and Truchlá 2020), clearly states that assertiveness is escalating with both above-mentioned superpowers. In that matter, Petříček once again repeated that Czechia must defend its western orientation. Quite predictably, the Czech Communists, notorious with their blackmail agenda towards Prime Minister Babiš in exchange for their support of the minority government, loudly called for Petříček's dismissal; similarly, it is not surprising that the minister is defended by the liberal media and the liberal-conservative opposition in the parliament rather than by the Prime Minister.

Lastly, perhaps the most visible activity with a strong ethical dimension was the President of the Senate visiting Taiwan. The project was prepared by Jaroslav Kubera, a former Senate President, and was taken up, after a certain hesitation, by Miloš Vystrčil, a new President of the Senate, in the wake of Kubera's sudden death in January 2020. It is symptomatic that the hesitation was caused in particular by the extremely aggressive actions of the Chinese ambassador in Czechia (previously also applied to Kubera) who teamed up with prominent Czech politicians, primarily the president and his power network. Martin Fendrych (2020b) commented on Vystrčil's decision as a 'Revelation in the Czech Republic and at the ODS Party'. In addition to pragmatic reasons with Taiwan being a reliable trading partner and, in many respects, an advanced and inspiring country and society, Vystrčil justified the project with the need to fight for the rule of law, freedom, sovereignty, and democracy.

The author of the present text believes that the list of other activities executed within CFP, in this section of the text, supports the view that the term 'revelation' may apply in the specific context of ODS but not to Czechia in general, as we still witness relatively intense efforts to maintain the ethical policy segment within the foreign policy agendas. At the same time, it is understandable that the business and scientific expedition led by Vystrčil as the President of the Senate has become a symbol of this policy for Czech journalists, whether they welcome it or reject it. In this respect, it is worth noticing that, besides Vystrčil, a large majority of senators endorsed the visit and that liberal-conservative senate clubs played a key role.

## ***Conclusion***

As of 2013, the human rights agenda and ethical foreign policy underwent a noticeable downturn within Czech foreign policy. Undoubtedly, the key reason is the withdrawal or negative attitudes of CFP official representatives towards this dimension of foreign policy and the preference for

pragmatic, economically oriented foreign policy, or rather an ideologically based rejection of ethical foreign policy on the part of a small state (which should allegedly conform to strong international policy players) or even a critical attitude towards the idea that Czechia, as part of the West, should be setting a human rights agenda towards ‘non-Western’ states. President Zeman clearly directed the foreign policy of his office to support Russia, the People’s Republic of China, and political leaders with strong inclinations to populism, national-conservative, and anti-liberal attitudes; his Islamophobia is likewise impossible to overlook. Foreign Minister Zaorálek and his first deputy Drulák aimed at amending and developing a foreign policy of human rights in Havel’s style, but they rather managed to drain any relevant value or sense of it.

As of 2017, Andrej Babiš’s administration has seen eye to eye with the President and has been inclined towards economic diplomacy, at the same time following selected trends from the Hungarian and Polish governments which eventually set Czechia aside from the mainstream stance of the EU. Foreign Minister Petříček then regularly reverses the negative trend, alternative avenues of foreign policy are also executed by the Senate and, on the level of para-diplomacy, also elected representatives of towns and regional departments.

### ***Recommendations***

- Seek further possibilities for a common position of the government or its part and the liberal-conservative opposition, as was the case with the statement of the three foreign ministers on the Israeli-Palestinian issue.
- Make use of the Senate and local governments to set ethical foreign policy agendas.
- Reject efforts to build a Central European cooperation, especially within the Visegrad Group, as a negation of the ‘core’ of the EU.
- Defend institutions promoting the human rights agenda, especially non-governmental organisations and the media, against pressures from the government and the President.

# The Eastern Partnership Entering a New Decade: Where to Go Next?

*Pavel Havlíček*

**Abstract:** Last year, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) celebrated its tenth anniversary since its launch in Prague in May 2009. Within the last twelve months, the European Union's eastern policy went through a process of strategic reflection and public consultation which produced numerous ideas, including by Czechia and the Visegrad Group under its presidency, on where policy should go next in the upcoming decade. Among them, the concept of resilience was confirmed by the European Parliament and Council to be the overarching framework for relations with the EaP countries. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the planned EaP summit in June 2020, which was supposed to confirm the new approach and plans for the future, was finally postponed until March 2021. Therefore, the following several months will be crucial for putting together a new set of deliverables and determining a new strategic framework for relations with the EaP countries until 2030. Even if no real breakthrough can be expected, the new approach should help the Eastern European states deepen their relations with the EU, implement the associated agenda, as well as tackle the domestic and external shocks and challenges, including those caused by the Covid-19 pandemic which hit the Eastern Partnership countries particularly hard.

**Keywords:** EU, Eastern Partnership, Foreign Policy, Eastern Europe, Russia, Czechia, Visegrad Group, EPP, Covid-19

## *Introduction*

If the year of 2019 was dedicated to the ten-year-anniversary of the EU's Eastern Partnership and strategic reflection on the future of the policy, then 2020 had an intriguing question at its core: Where to go next? This question has basically loomed over the EU and EaP decision-makers, state officials, as well as expert and civil communities over the last couple of months. The policy details of this question will stay with us until at least the next EaP summit in March 2021. Therefore, while the 2019 celebrations concluded on a note that the EaP had been a success so far, bringing numerous concrete benefits to all six partner countries and the EU, there was also a general agreement on the need for strategic reflection and looking for new ways forward beyond 2020. Unfortunately, to find a common ground and sufficient compromise that would suit not only the EU27 but also the eastern partners proved to be even more complicated than originally expected.

## *Looking for a New Agenda*

During the summer and autumn of 2019, the EU's eastern policy went through a complex reflection and revision process organised by the European Commission which allowed all stakeholders to brainstorm about the future of EaP beyond 2020. This was not due to the change of power in Brussels after the 2019 European Parliament elections, but mainly the fact that the EaP's reform agenda of twenty points for 2020 was soon to expire. Apart from that, the year of 2020 represented another milestone for the associated countries and their bilateral relations with the EU. It reached a momentum in several respects; mutual obligations as part of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA) should be delivered and updated. This is particularly the case for Ukraine but to some degree also for Georgia and Moldova. Altogether this means that the EaP must come up with a new agenda.

Several months of collecting feedback and determining the consensus among the EU member states, partner countries, and EU institutions, as well as the expert community and civil society, talks finally concluded in spring 2020. On 19 March 2020, the European Commission presented its vision 'Reinforcing Resilience — an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all' for the future of the EaP in the upcoming decade. In addition to a strong emphasis on the economy and concrete benefits for the citizens of Eastern Europe, the Commission communication also set out new priorities for digitalisation and combating climate change. The EU's executive also came up with a new approach for promoting societal resilience in six Eastern European countries that should be better prepared to resist domestic and external shocks in the future. On the other hand, the Commission acknowledged weak progress in areas of rule of law, the fight against corruption, and good governance, all of which it promised to amend by closer monitoring and incentivisation of the implementation of reforms in these challenging areas.

At the same time, the Commission refused to engage in a highly political debate regarding closer political association or any kind of comprehensive vision for the region in the future due to a lack of consensus on the membership of Eastern European countries in the EU. It also did not acknowledge efforts to further differentiate between the EaP countries and gave strong preferential treatment to the three associated countries of the EU — Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. These issues were left for the European Parliament, the EU members, and the EaP countries themselves to negotiate and decide before the high-level summit of the EaP, which was supposed to take place in mid-June 2020 at the very end of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

For lack of a response to some of the fundamental questions related to the future of EaP, a number of actors shared their criticism of the Commission's approach. This was particularly the case given



the low emphasis on the fundamentals of cooperation and European values, which constituted the overall framework for cooperation with the EU in the past. In the Commission's communication, the principles of democracy and human rights, the rule of law and the fight against corruption, the support for independent media, and civil society were mixed in between finance and banking operations, or in the new domain of public health protection, without significant hierarchy on the list of Commission's priorities. This might not come as a complete surprise, given the Commission's emphasis on pragmatism in international relations based on the 2016 EU's Global Strategy, but it became a subject of criticism from some member states anyway.

Others, particularly Members of the European Parliament, lambasted the Commission's unwillingness to promote further differentiation and move relations with three associated countries to a higher level, as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova requested. More concretely, Ukrainians, Georgians, and Moldovans lobbied for the 'Trio Strategy', which would have allowed the three associated countries to prepare their integration into the European project. It included new instruments for the implementation of associated agenda or a brand new flagship initiative similar to the Berlin Process of the Western Balkans, as well as having privileged access to the EU decision-making and a special calendar of events until 2030 (as elaborated at the 2019 European People's Party (EPP) Congress in Zagreb).

While the Council's conclusions from 11 May 2020 (Council of the European Union 2020b) brought the fundamental values of cooperation back to the core of EaP agenda, substantial resistance and disagreement among the member states surrounded the reference to the 'European aspirations' of the associated countries, the future political associations, and deeper economic integration into the EU's single market. Although the conclusions were carefully drafted and presented a highly balanced vision for the period beyond 2020, for some, there was still not enough substance and concrete policy actions described for the future of the EaP extending to 2030, except for sustainability and alignment of the EaP with the 2030 Sustainable Goals for Development (SDGs) of UN.

The European Parliament took time to reflect on the future of the EaP but then resolutely supported both of the contested issues of deeper economic integration and closer political association, especially when referring to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union. It called for proper guidance and further steps for the associated countries and their reform processes, and proposed inclusion for observers from the associated countries in the activities of the Commission and the Council, as well as an emphasis on the core values of the EU in mutual relations or security concerns. Its recommendations, approved by the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) on 19 May 2020 (and adopted in its Report from 9 June 2020), also proposed to include the associated countries in selected EU agencies and intra-EU programmes and initiatives, as well as sectoral integration and



the Energy Union, Transport Community, and the Digital Single Market. By supporting small steps for integration in the area of telecommunications or Single European Payment Area (SEPA), the Parliament presented an interesting and concrete path into the new decade, even if no agreement was found for a fully-fledged differentiation in the form of the potential Trio Strategy.

### ***Resilience to the Current Challenges***

When assessing the current state of the EaP and the individual partner countries, it is useful to apply the logic of resilience, which the EU sees ‘in the areas of democracy, society, economy, energy, security, cyber, media, environment, health, notably in the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic, and human security’, as the Council’s conclusions most recently mentioned. The crisis of public health caused by the coronavirus has exposed numerous vulnerabilities in partner countries (and the EU) to domestic and external threats. The region has seen many old problems now become more exposed and worsened by the emergency. In Azerbaijan and Belarus, for example, we have seen local regimes cracking down on the political opposition as well as civil society and independent media who were blamed for causing the pandemic. Dozens were put in jail, in administrative detentions, repressed financially, or repressed by other means. Other countries, such as Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, had a higher degree of social cohesion and cooperation between the state and its citizens, including civil society. But even there, the local elites could not miss an opportunity to strengthen their positions and power over the citizens, as well as take the credit for economic redistribution and providing their citizens with basic means of protection.

This was especially the case in four out of six Eastern European states which are supposed to hold presidential or parliamentary (in case of Ukraine local) elections over the next several months. Among them, Moldova has recorded a high level of societal tension and polarisation before the crucial presidential elections, including miscommunication, and chaos in society. Moldova alone has witnessed an escalation in relations with medical personnel, who criticised the government for lack of preparedness to face the crisis, and from that conflicts stemming around freedom of speech and the Audio-visual Council of Moldova, and the public contestation of government negotiations for a loan from Russia.

Moreover, to further add on the pile of domestic challenges, the EaP countries continue to face problems with separatism and the de facto states which are not operating under the jurisdiction of the six partner countries. While the situation of the so-called People’s Republics in Donetsk and Lugansk proved complicated, in Nagorno Karabakh we have seen complete isolation of the local population and lack of support from the international community due to disagreements between Armenia and

Azerbaijan over the territory, including in humanitarian aspects. On the other hand, Georgia's approach to Abkhazia was identified as exemplary by experts, since it allowed the local population to enjoy the benefits of cooperation with international organisations and, for example, access for World Health Organisation (WHO) experts. It was also complicated to effectively deal with the consequences of the 'Infodemics', further exacerbated by Russian propaganda and disinformation operations, which continued to sow mistrust and divide the state and its institutions from the citizens.

The economic crisis hit the EaP countries with small (with the sole exception of Ukraine) and open economies particularly hard. Georgia has been the most affected of the six countries, with the year-to-year real decline of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) up to 10.2%, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) report from May 2020. Georgia has paid a particularly high price for its early and efficient start of the emergency regime, which has protected the lives of people but crippled the economy. Secondly, Armenia, Ukraine, and Moldova reported a decrease of around 8% of real GDP, while Belarus and Azerbaijan reported -6.2%, and -5.4% respectively. The economies of the EaP countries, further affected by the drop in the price of oil and gas resources, proved extremely vulnerable to such economic shocks and the slowdown of the global economy.

On the other hand, the local population and civil society proved immensely resilient towards these domestic and external shocks and could mediate the most severe implications of the pandemic. For example, in Armenia, citizens managed to fundraise a significant amount of money for the state authorities to implement the necessary measures and provide protection to the most vulnerable groups in society. In Ukraine, the cooperation between civil society and the local business community managed to mobilise resources, provide medical equipment, and help elderly and ill citizens. Belarusian civil society has for its part completely supplemented the state in raising public awareness of the problem, mobilizing resources in society, as well as buying and creating personal protection equipment, including face masks. The Lukashenko regime refused to even acknowledge the challenge and its real extent. On top of that, the Belarusian president spread lies about the effect of coronavirus and offered fake means of protection, misinforming the citizens. The Belarusian authorities also refused to cancel public events, including the World War II parade on 9th May, and football matches continued to attract a large number of citizens who could easily fall victim to the virus. Armenian and Georgian civil societies also delivered help to citizens and offered their expertise to the state to fight the pandemic together. Therefore, while the region has seen a mix of positive and negative practices and responses from the partner countries, these usually reflected a long-term trend in the behaviour of the state authorities and their interactions with citizens and civil society.

## *Looking into the Future*

Despite all the input from numerous state and non-state stakeholders, much remains to be seen in the future of the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. The EaP will in any case have a less than ideal start to the new decade due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its multi-level implications for the EU and EaP countries. But, while many things remain unpredictable, there are some reasons to remain hopeful and believe that the Partnership will remain a priority for the EU and its foreign policy. For that, the EU needs to meet several conditions.

First and foremost, the EU must realise that except for the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership is the second most important and closest region in the world, in which the EU should take action, as it promised when the European Commission called itself ‘geopolitical’. It might be the geopolitical and ‘geoeconomic’ approach, which the Commission started using in South-Eastern Europe, that might ultimately win the hearts and minds in Eastern Europe, too. This could get the local citizens and elites on the side of the Union by pursuing closer economic and political integration, while at the same time decreasing the influence of third parties, such as Russia and China. The EU’s promised economic aid and macro-financial assistance to respond to the pandemic, while bringing in economic recovery in the mid- to long-term, might present the right approach. Apart from that, the EU also needs to apply a ‘smart conditionality’ to push for pro-democratic and pro-market reforms which could move the EaP countries closer to the Union. At the same time, it is essential to carefully manage mutual expectations and support local pro-reform circles, including politicians, civil society, or business, by sufficient financial, and technical means. It has to be clear to EaP societies that the prospect of EU membership is realistically off the table for the foreseeable future.

Second, before the future Eastern Partnership summit in March 2021, there needs to be more clarity of the political narrative and a serious offer to develop relations with the Eastern partners over the next decade. It is obvious that the European Parliament and several EU member states, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, are interested in keeping the EaP high on the EU’s agenda and deepen the mutual relations not only in the economic realm but also politically. However, it is crucial to convince the rest of the EU that this investment will pay off in the future and bring prosperity and stabilisation to the Eastern Neighbourhood and EU member states from Portugal to Finland. If the EU stands united, despite the Covid-19 pandemic and differing priorities, and if it is ambitious in its offer for the period after 2020, we might see Eastern Europe well-prepared for deeper political integration - along the lines of the UK’s future agreement, and a full-fledged form of economic integration into the single market at the end of the upcoming decade. The final declaration from the upcoming summit, the presentation of a new set of deliverables, and the final outcome of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations will underpin the EU’s success in this strategic region.

Finally, bilateral agreements with Russia over the heads of eastern partners must be avoided by any means, as these would throw the region in instability and internal chaos, counter to the EU's original objectives of promoting stability, security, and prosperity in Eastern Europe. On contrary, with the help and support of the local population, similar to the situation of Central Europe during the 1990s when returning 'back to Europe', local elites, business and civil society must help implement painful reforms and modernise their countries, and raise the living standards of their citizens because it is important for them (and not their partners in the West).

### ***Czech and V4 Contributions***

During 2019/20, Czech diplomacy continued to be among the active and reputable players on the Eastern Partnership front. After two high-level conferences hosted by ministries of foreign affairs and industry and trade in 2019, Czechia came up with its influential non-paper showcasing resilience as the future framework of the EaP, which was circulated among the EU member states and finally endorsed by more than ten of them, including the Visegrad Group. After public consultation in summer and autumn 2019, to which Czechia and the V4 countries also contributed, and after successful lobbying in Brussels this approach was adopted by the European Commission as a new meta-narrative for the future of EaP beyond 2020. The Czech V4 presidency in 2019/20 also had the EU's eastern policy in its core. This was the case both at the level of state officials and their coordination meetings, as well as high-level consultations among foreign ministries. The latter, in April 2020, presented a Visegrad Joint Statement on the future of the EaP beyond 2020 and established the new programme 'V4EastSolidarity' to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic in Eastern Europe, as part of the International Visegrad Fund. A ministerial conference of the V4 and EaP was only cancelled due to the coronavirus emergency.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the EaP high-level summit planned for June 2020 also had to be rescheduled for March 2021, despite opposition from Czechia, the remaining Visegrad countries, and other EU member states. While at least the meeting of Eastern Partnership leaders took place in mid-June 2020, there is still an urgent need to adopt the future agenda for the policy since the '20 Deliverables for 2020' are about to expire by the end of this year. This might provide additional opportunities for Czechia and the Polish V4 Presidency to shape the agenda and push for their priorities and opinions regarding the content of the future EU's eastern policy.

Even if the new long-term priorities leading up to 2030 remain unclear now, they will certainly reflect the new EU's focus areas of digital and green agendas, as well as resilience as a new framework for future political and economic relations. What is important from the Czech and V4 perspectives is that the newly formed basis for cooperation provides an opportunity to move relations with Eastern

partners to a higher level, thanks to sectoral integration advocated by Czechia. Concurrently, Czech and V4 diplomatic efforts should be aimed at making the best out of the EU negotiations with the MFF, which only provided a limited budget for the external NDICI instrument (Council of the European Union 2020a). The Czechs should also place a strong emphasis on the basic values of the EaP and the deepening of the Euro-Atlantic orientation, especially with the associated countries of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. On the other hand, the Trio Strategy does not have Czech support since it splits the original format and prevents full inclusivity.

To sum up, the main challenge for Czech and Visegrad diplomacy will be to not only motivate partner countries to implement complex reforms and deal with security-related issues, but also to fulfil mutual relations with sufficiently ambitious content, especially if Czechia is to host the next EaP summit during its EU presidency in the second half of 2022. The Czech government should keep this option on the table despite the recent changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, but also turn this opportunity into a foreign policy success and create another Czech footprint, with new elements to its long-term priority. This will require a certain amount of imagination, and political capital and diplomatic skills to work on this topic over a longer period to successfully negotiate realistic proposals with partners for the future development of the EaP, which the Czech government should start doing today. The V4 format of cooperation and the Polish V4 Presidency will certainly be good allies and platforms for such negotiations and coordination with other European partners.

### ***The EPP's Position on the Future of Eastern Partnership***

As a 'party of enlargement' with a strong focus on the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the position of European People's Party (EPP) has traditionally been crucial for the Eastern Partnership and its future. While its rival, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), has in the past paid more attention to the southern neighbourhood (and the Union for the Mediterranean), the EPP had Western Balkans and Eastern Europe in the core of its foreign policy orientation. The most recent illustration of this focus on the EaP has been the EPP's Congress in Zagreb in November 2019, where the party endorsed proposals by the delegation of Lithuanian Christian Democrats and the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly's co-chair Andrius Kubilius on the EU Trio Strategy 2030. In its resolution on the future of Eastern Partnership, the EPP called for establishing a special approach to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, as the Associated Trio countries, and having a more differentiated framework under the 'more for more' principle. More concretely, this new vision was supposed to be based on three pillars of new instruments and an investment plan for the Trio, deeper integration modelled on the Berlin Process of the Western Balkan countries, and a particular calendar of events

with benchmarks and key moments for future integration leading up to 2030, built around individual member states' presidencies.

With the Trio Strategy 2030, the EPP illustrated its level of ambitions for the future of the EaP in the upcoming decade, which was then reflected in subsequent negotiations in the European Council and the European Parliament. For example, in the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the EPP Group Members advocated a more ambitious approach to the associated countries, which finally resulted in proposing their inclusion as observers to the working level of the European Commission and Council. Yet, the Trio Strategy did not succeed in being accepted by the majority of AFET members and failed to appear in the final resolution of the European Parliament on the future of the EaP in June 2020, due to a lack of consensus on this issue among different stakeholders and party groups.

On the other hand, during the 7th EPP Eastern Partnership Leaders meeting on 17 June 2020, the EPP's president Donald Tusk underlined the importance of the Eastern Partnership and the interests of the party in keeping the policy high on the European agenda, despite the rescheduled summit until March 2021. In his speech, he not only cited the key features of the EPP's approach built around the value perspective and a strong emphasis on values and international law, but also pushed for a security dimension, including conflict resolution in the *de facto* states around the post-Soviet space. He also highlighted the importance of resilience and solidarity in times of Covid-19 pandemic, which will be crucial for the upcoming months and years, as well as messages for individual EaP countries. In that context, the EPP could be careful about external partnerships with third parties in the region, which due to the dubious reputation of some of them might challenge the value-driven approach of the EPP to Eastern Partnership and bring back the party-oriented and particular interest approach to the policy.

## ***Conclusions***

The last year of Eastern Partnership brought not only a strategic reflection on the future of the EU's eastern policy but more importantly some concrete policy proposals for the development in the next decade. Thanks to the complex and inclusive approach of the European Commission and the involvement of many European and Eastern Partnership stakeholders, including from think-tanks, the expert community, and civil society, public consultation produced many new ideas. Some of them, such as the new overarching framework of resilience, to which the Czech diplomacy actively contributed, are definitely steps in the right direction. However, a consensus on the future of the policy is still missing and its contested political narrative should motivate the EU leaders to further debate this crucial component of the Eastern Partnership.

Another big task for the upcoming months will be the preparation of the new set of deliverables and the new framework for their implementation that will be discussed among the EU member states as well as the partner countries and civil society or expert community. It will be necessary to determine concrete benchmarks and increase the EU's capacity to measure the progress of the individual countries on the ground. Due to these complex challenges, it might be beneficial to have the next high-level summit of the Eastern Partnership in March 2021, when it becomes clear how and where to go next in the upcoming decade.

## ***Recommendations***

### *For the EU stakeholders*

- Keep the Eastern Partnership high on the European agenda and bilateral relations with individual countries relevant and beneficial for the local citizens.
- Keep the strong, value-oriented approach to the Eastern Partnership and use the concept of smart conditionality, financial help, and technical assistance to implement the associated agenda and advance the EaP's relations with the EU.
- Combine both founding principles of the Eastern Partnership — differentiation and inclusivity — when it comes to the future development of the EaP policy. Both 'more for more' and 'less for less' approaches should be applied to the EaP countries.
- Continue with the EU's dialogue on the end-goal of the Eastern Partnership and advocate for the transatlantic orientation and EU membership prospects in the long-run.
- Try to overcome or avoid EU's bottlenecks in the development of future relations with individual EaP countries caused by cross-border issues and block relations of the EU27 with the individual EaP countries, for example, regarding the Ostrovets nuclear power station.
- Select a realistic and measurable set of deliverables for the upcoming decade of the EaP that would suit individual partner countries and be ambitious enough to advance not only their EU aspirations but also democratisation and other fundamental European values.
- Transform the concept of resilience into concrete projects and initiatives that would benefit not only the EaP governments but also the citizens and their security.
- Promote the security dimension of the Eastern Partnership, including conflict resolution in the *de facto* states around the post-Soviet space, utilising the new framework of resilience for the benefit of the citizens, particularly vulnerable groups.



- Continue, including by financial means, to support civil society, independent media, and SMEs as crucial EU's allies in promoting Europeanisation in the EaP countries.
- Continue to emphasise free trade (agreements) and the removal of the remaining barriers, including in relations with the associated countries whose AAs/DCFTAs are currently going through a systemic review by the European Commission and the European External Action Service.
- Invest more in the strategic communication component of the EU's relations with the EaP, including boosting the capacity of the EU delegations in the region and expanding partnerships with pro-democracy and pro-EU actors in the six countries.

*For Czechia and the V4 countries*

- Play the role of bridge-builders and facilitators for the EaP agenda, which needs to be endorsed not only by the Central and Eastern European countries but the EU as a whole.
- Share the transformational know-how and examples of best practices for political, economic and societal transformation, including through cooperation with civil society, independent media, SMEs, and other pro-democracy actors.
- Invest and continue (financially) to support the capacity of the EaP countries in absorbing the EU's *acquis* to advance their European aspirations and approximation with EU legislation, including by the expansion of the Twinning and TAIEX programmes.
- Promote a high-level dialogue with the EaP countries and incentivise the implementation of the structural reforms, including by restarting the V4+ projects and initiatives.
- Turn the new 'V4EastSolidarity' Programme into concrete support initiatives which would benefit EaP citizens and their well-being, including economic recovery.



# Covid's Challenges for the EU and Its Place in the World

*Olaf Wientzek*

**Abstract:** The corona crisis is a litmus test for the EU, both internally as well as for its global ambitions. While the EU had a bumpy start addressing the crisis, its response has improved significantly since. Furthermore, the crisis has highlighted or accelerated some already existing tendencies on the international level, one of them being the increased global ambition and assertiveness of China. With the weakened credibility of the USA in the management of the Corona crisis, the EU will have to demonstrate more global leadership. This will be crucial in order to avoid the weakening of the Global West and its values as a result of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Future of Europe, Multilateralism, Coronavirus

## *Introduction*

The Covid-pandemic is a litmus test for the EU, both internally as well as for its global aspirations. The following text will highlight the significance of the crisis for the EU as well as its role in the world and — more specifically — in multilateral fora. In many ways, the Covid-pandemic has functioned as an accelerator for already existing tendencies in international politics. While it is far too early to predict the consequences of the crisis for the EU and its global role, certain developments can already be detected. However, definitive predictions should be approached very cautiously. Taking a coherent and courageous approach to address the crisis not only at an inner-EU level, but also globally, will determine how the EU comes out of this crisis. Centre-right parties will play a key role in ensuring that the EU manages to draw the correct lessons from the pandemic.

## *The EU's Bumpy Start*

The beginning of the EU's reaction was not particularly glorious; it took its time to react and develop a coherent response. One of the reasons for the EU's initially disappointing response has been the fact that health policy is not in the EU's jurisdiction, and coordination between member states has not been a major priority in the past decades. Still, the initial failure to provide aid to the worst-hit countries, such as Italy, has led to a serious crisis of confidence in the EU, particularly among those worst hit by the crisis. The existing crisis mechanisms have fallen short due to a lack of response by the member states.

Secondly, the fact that the crisis hit all EU member states at the same time has further contributed to a fractured and uncoordinated response. One less than impressive aspect has been the uncoordinated closure of borders — which heavily impacted not only on the free movement of EU citizens and the economy, but the reputation of the EU as a whole. Thirdly, the magnitude of the crisis only became apparent with time. As with every other country, all member states had to come to grips with how to address an existential challenge. Overall, the initial deficits of the EU’s reaction have shaped the discourse and made it more difficult to communicate regarding improvements in the months since.

### ***The EU’s Performance Has Been Better Than Its Reputation***

Despite the EU’s initial problems in responding to the crisis in March 2020, both the EU institutions and the member states have tried, at least with partial success, to improve their response both regarding health policy and addressing other aspects of the crisis.

#### *Enhancing Health Policy and Emergency Support*

Eventually, the EU countries engaged in mutual support, taking actions such as treating patients of other EU countries. On 17 June 2020, the European Commission presented a European strategy to accelerate the development, manufacturing and deployment of vaccines against Covid-19. Additionally, the EU has ensured the availability of medical supply and equipment and provided states with medical material. The EU’s combined negotiation power has borne fruit in talks with potential producers of a vaccine; on 31 July 2020, the European Commission announced that it had concluded exploratory talks with Sanofi to purchase a potential vaccine against Covid-19. This option would make it possible for all EU Member States to purchase the vaccine. Once a vaccine has proven to be safe, the Commission could thus buy 300 million doses on behalf of all EU Member States (European Commission 2020b). Furthermore, with the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework — if it is approved in its current form — the EU decided to invest EUR 9.4 billion in the coming seven years to tackle cross-border health threats through the EU4Health Programme (European Commission 2020a).

#### *Economic Support*

One area in which the EU does have strong competences is the economy. While maximalist demands have created a different impression, the EU has demonstrated its readiness to provide an unprecedented level of economic solidarity in order to address key challenges of the crisis, one example of which is the agreement on the EU recovery fund (Next Generation EU), which will overall provide a package

of EUR 750 billion in order to support the economic recovery after the crisis (European Council 2020b). While coming to an agreement on this package may have been difficult, to put it mildly, its size and scope is indeed unprecedented. The package, which combines grants and loans, is destined to support the economic recovery of the member states, supporting private investments in key innovative technologies.<sup>2</sup> Recurring grants is a first for the EU, and not without risk, as it will be considered as a precedence by some for further perpetual forms of pooling debt and will be taken out of the crisis context. However, given the looming economic crunch it seems a risky but necessary step in order to avoid a long-term recession. While the very cumbersome negotiation process will likely not leave the EU and the relationship between its member states unscarred, it has demonstrated the EU's capacity to act and to show economic solidarity, albeit conditional, which is globally unparalleled. While the EU recovery fund is not without potential pitfalls, it had one important political objective: to avoid letting the EU fall apart. As the following observations will demonstrate, a united EU will be key in addressing the pandemic and to avoid allowing the crisis to become a tectonic shift in favour of the EU's and the West's systemic rivals.

### *Increased Support for Non-EU Countries*

The EU has also supported countries in its immediate neighbourhood. Already by the end of March 2020, the European Commission had mobilized EUR 38 million of immediate aid for the health care systems in Western Balkan countries, and EUR 140 million for its Eastern neighbours (European Council 2020c). While support for the development of countries, such as Serbia, has been substantially higher than the one provided by China, it has enjoyed less visibility. This led to the misleading impression that the EU has been providing less aid than Beijing.

### *The EU Will Have to Take More Responsibility for Multilateral Fora*

The crisis has demonstrated the importance of viable global organisations and platforms. In a pandemic, regional organisations or alliances certainly matter, but a global pandemic cannot be addressed without some form of coordination on a global level. First and foremost, the WHO has played a crucial role in warning and advising member states, issuing recommendations, pooling resources, coordinating efforts to combat the virus, and providing operational and technical support. Other organisations, such as the WTO and its fight against hidden protectionist measures, have shown their potential importance and equally demonstrated their relevance. However, the crisis has revealed the limitations of these for being underequipped, limited in their mandate, and completely dependent on the willingness of member states to cooperate.

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<sup>2</sup> A summary of both the priorities of the recovery fund and the MFF is available at European Commission (2020d).

During the Coronavirus crisis, the EU, considering itself as a champion of multilateralism, has demonstratively supported the WHO (including a substantial increase of its financial support by some of its member states, such as Germany). Another example was the organisation of a massive donors conference in cooperation with the WHO in the beginning of May 2020, intended to coordinate and pool resources in the fight against the virus. At least to a certain extent, the EU has thus provided global leadership in the crisis; more of the same will continue to be needed, given an increasingly toxic global geopolitical climate.

### ***China's Assertiveness: A Wake-Up Call for the EU***

Despite the fact that the lack of cooperation with the WHO on the part of China in the beginning of the crisis has likely contributed to the pandemic's escalation, the pandemic has not stopped China from trying to use the crisis to its advantage. China has demonstrated its global ambition and its willingness to use global public fora accordingly.<sup>3</sup> China has strongly overemphasised its aid and support, particularly aid to EU member states, as well as to countries in the EU's immediate neighbourhood. Over the past months, as pressure was put on the EU to make a declaration on Covid-19, reports about biased or even fake news have also shown that Beijing is far from squeamish in its choice of instruments (Burchard and Barigazzi 2020). In short, if there were any illusions left about China's role, those have been shattered in the past weeks as the EU has received a painful reminder about how important a joint stance towards Beijing would be. Despite its mistakes during the first weeks of the crisis, it does not seem that China's global influence will diminish in multilateral organisations. Many countries have received substantial material support from China and will likely be increasingly economically dependent on China in order to relaunch their economies. President Xi's announcement of financial support for the fight against Covid-19 in African states is a clear indicator that China seems ready to use momentum to increase its leverage.

While the EU and China share the conviction that the WHO is the relevant global platform to address the crisis, the EU should not fool itself: China will use this momentum to increase its influence on the international level, and thereby also weaken the EU's influence. The EU should therefore increase the efforts to agree on a comprehensive policy towards China which will certainly embrace cooperation where necessary but which also needs to be aware that China is a systemic rival on many other questions. This should lead to a calibrated trade policy, strengthening of trade defence instruments, and stronger engagement with key non-EU countries and multilateral organisations in order to counter Beijing's influence.

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<sup>3</sup> One example was the statement of Xi Jinping at the opening of the World Health Assembly (Xinhuanet.cn 2020).

### ***The EU-US Relation under Increasing Stress***

China's prominent role is exacerbated by the accelerated waning of the USA's soft power, or soft power credibility, in the context of the crisis. The perceived deficits of American administration in handling the crisis at home is one of the drivers of this. Secondly, and probably most importantly, the lack of global leadership by the US administration provided during the crisis has damaged its soft-power reputation: the US has not made efforts to take the lead in a global alliance to fight the virus, but rather refused to call for a vaccine to be declared as a common global good, and even initiated its departure from the WHO. While some of American criticism towards China and the WHO is shared at least to some extent in other capitals, none has echoed the calls of weakening or even leaving the WHO. While the US continues to be the main or one of the main contributors to many international organisations, its role is not uncontested and its position on the Covid-crisis has not resonated strongly even with traditional allies such as the EU. A rather competitive — instead of cooperative — approach by the US government to the crisis has led to great irritation on the European side and a further erosion of trust.

### ***The West Is Not Finished Yet, but under Pressure***

Despite early predictions in March that the Global West will lose ground both in its global role as well as regarding its attractiveness as normative model due to the crisis, such predictions seem premature. The initial argument that autocratic regimes are managing the crisis better than democratic or open societies cannot be upheld. Good or bad management could be found both among hybrid regimes as well as democratic societies. It should also not be overlooked that despite a lack of US leadership in the crisis, many Western countries demonstrated leadership: The EU played in a driving role in the ACT initiative, which coordinates and financially supports research for therapies, diagnostics, and vaccines. Also, countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Switzerland have been key in the WTO to assemble coalitions against the protectionism of medical equipment or food supplies. It was overwhelmingly countries from the Global West which financed various initiatives to combat the virus. At the same time, Germany and France were determined to present an ambitious proposal for the reform of the WHO. In summary, other countries from the Global West have tried to step in, thereby trying to fill the (perhaps temporary) vacuum the USA has left.

However, the West and its governance model continue to be challenged: the attacks through fake news, and the aggressive promotion of authoritarian governance models presented as more capable alternatives have increased. Given that the US has not been able to provide its usual degree of leadership in this crisis thus far, the EU has even more responsibility to step up as a leader of the

Global West and demonstrate that it is more than a merely a fair-weather union when it comes to foreign policy. However, it will be insufficient if the EU acts alone; more important than ever, it will be crucial to acquire allies. This includes the ‘usual suspects’ such as Switzerland, Norway, Canada, Iceland, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan: that is, countries with whom the EU has a very strong overlap in terms of values, as well as in its understanding of market economies. In many cases this will not suffice. The EU will have to engage more strategically with key countries from Latin America, South and South East Asia, as well as Africa. This may be a costly affair, both in terms of diplomatic as well as economic efforts. The alternative is however not appealing: The crisis has shown that a lack of transparency and democratic accountability can help escalate a crisis.

***The EU Is Unlikely to Be ‘Strategically Autonomous’ at the End of the Crisis, a Good Transatlantic Relationship Will Thus Remain Important***

While discourse and soft power are important, hard power still matters. And here, Corona has not changed the global power structures yet. US military power remains unparalleled, however, it is likely that in times of a recession and a pandemic, the start of new military campaigns and the sustaining of old military campaigns may be considered as too costly, as is true for every global or regional power. Despite the erosion of its soft power credibility in the context of the crisis, the US remains also the most important leader in innovation and research, and the development of the vaccine first in the US can still be considered as a likely scenario.

For the EU it will therefore be of utmost importance to not let relations deteriorate into a state of irreparable damage. Rhetoric aside, both sides will still keep depending on each other: the EU will need the US as a guarantor for its own security, and the US will need the EU as a key partner which it cannot lose to China. European NATO countries will thus have to invest more into their security and defence — a tall order given the fact that most countries will face a heavy burden on their national budgets. As the WHO correctly argues, the pandemic is far from over, and neither is the struggle to handle the health-related, the economic, social, and societal impact of the crisis. A consequence of this is the quest for influence in international fora and for the establishment of the global narrative on the causes of, performance during and fight against the pandemic will likely continue. It also means that it is still too early to make final assessments about the EU’s ability to respond to the crisis. The crisis may lead the EU to a credibility crisis but may also lead to its strengthening and becoming a more serious actor on the world stage.

## ***Consequences for the Centre-Right: What Does This Mean Regarding the EU Policy of the Centre-Right?***

- It should support the enhancement of coordination of national health policies as well as the strengthening (financially and politically) of health crisis prevention policies, including the role of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).
- Push for a ‘smart recovery’ making efficient use of new and old crisis instruments to relaunch the economy. More specifically:
  - Using the money from the EU recovery fund for the centre-right priorities, innovation, greening the economy, modernizing health sectors and digitalization;
  - The EU recovery fund is in many ways an exceptional instrument responding to an extraordinary situation. In this situation, centre-right parties should pay attention to make sure the money is not misused, and the mechanisms are not copied blindly, leading to a weakening of fiscal discipline and responsibility. The centre-right should also insist on strict conditionality (not only regarding rule of law, but also that the money is used for future-oriented policies and not fulfilling illusory election promises). In that same context, the centre-right needs to insist that this case does not lead to the abandonment of the link between solidarity, reasonability, subsidiarity on which the EU’s economic and financial policies should be build;
  - Protect international economic openness. The EPP family and the centre-right should remain a defender of rule-based free trade and protectionism. While a rethinking of supply chains and trade defence instruments are important, a reinvigoration of global trade will be key for the European and global recovery.
- Support multilateral organisations and their reform. Despite of all their shortcomings, the world needs functioning (and well-funded) multilateral organisations. With the US reducing or strongly conditioning its support, it is in the interest of the centre-right to push for engagement in these organisations — otherwise the vacuum risks being filled by China and other autocratic forces. However, the EU should accompany its support with a strong push for the reform of these organisation, increasing their transparency and also their independence.
- Push for an assertive and coherent policy towards China. A decoupling from China does not seem realistic option, neither politically nor economically. However, while China and its influence will remain an unavoidable fact on the world stage, centre-right parties should push for a united front regarding attempts of China to influence EU diplomacy and be wary of the influence of China state-linked enterprises on key infrastructure.

- Do not give up on the US. Despite the problematic policies of the current administration, the centre-right should not abandon Washington. It should, of course, protect its own interests in trade and global health, but it should also stick to its own commitments in the transatlantic alliance. Facing increasingly assertive authoritarian actors all around the world, the transatlantic alliance will remain crucial in post-Covid-times as well, if the EU wants to protect its own interests and its normative appeal.



# Transformation of Understaffed and Pandemic-Stricken Hospital Systems

*Pavel Hroboň*

**Abstract:** The Czech health system, similarly to other European health systems, is in need of deep structural transformation. This is largely due to the growing importance of chronic conditions, ageing population, concentration of specialized care to fewer providers, social change, shortage of physicians and nurses, and the impact of the pandemic. The increase in problems have inspired new models of health services. One of the most important tasks is to restructure the hospital system, which is the subject matter of this paper. The restructuring lies in decreasing the number of hospitals which provide round-the-clock emergent inpatient care.<sup>4</sup> Traditional district hospitals will be gradually split into facilities delivering emergent care at least in basic specialties in order to ensure access, and into hospitals which will no longer have to supply such demanding services. The latter will transition into community hospitals providing less demanding care. Careful calculation of transport accessibility and the capacity required need to be considered in the selection of hospitals. The decision cannot be based on the operational struggles of a hospital. Experience from other countries shows that hospitals which undergo transformations are able to stabilize in terms of personnel and finances, and provide the required and high-quality health services in their catchment area.

**Keywords:** Hospital Transformation, Access to Healthcare, Community Hospital

## *Introduction*

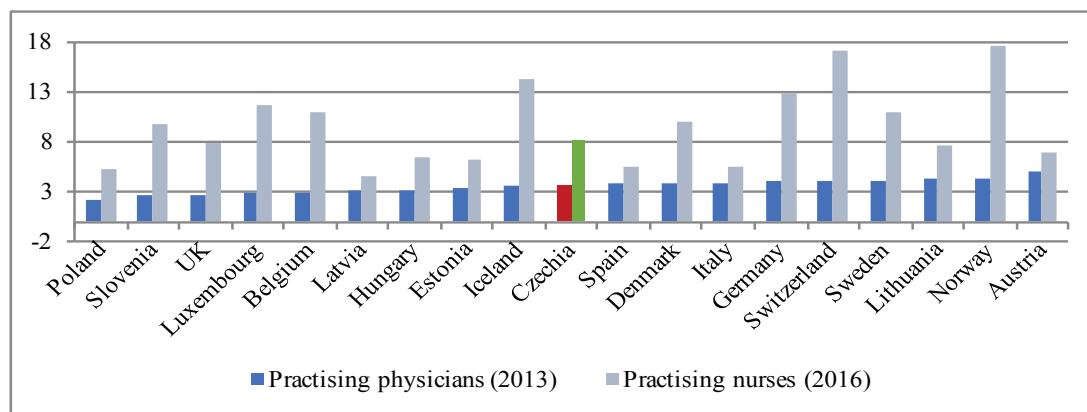
According to the Czech Medical Chamber, as of February 2020, Czech hospitals were short of 967 physicians and emergency medical services of further 394 physicians.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the number of physicians in the Czech healthcare system has been on a steady rise (see for example data from the Czech Institute of Health Information and Statistics, [www.uzis.cz](http://www.uzis.cz)) and, compared with other countries, Czechia does not suffer from below-average numbers of physicians and nurses (Fig. 1).

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<sup>4</sup> Emergent care is life-saving, has to be provided by well-equipped acute care hospitals, urgent care is less serious (may be provided by outpatient clinic or community hospitals).

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see [www.zdravotnictvivolaopomoc.cz](http://www.zdravotnictvivolaopomoc.cz).

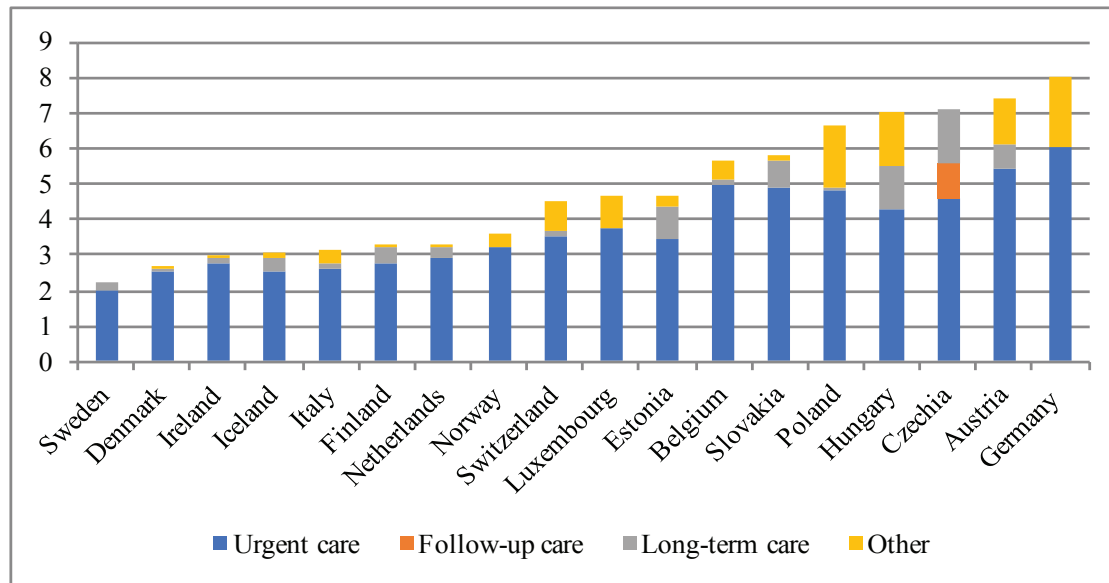
**Fig. 1: Number of Practising Physicians/Nurses per 1,000 Inhabitants (2013, 2016)**



Source: OECD (2019a).

The main problem, clearly, is not their absolute number, but the way they are currently deployed. Czechia has one of the highest numbers of acute care hospital beds in Europe per capita (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2: Number of Hospital Beds per 1,000 Population (2017)**

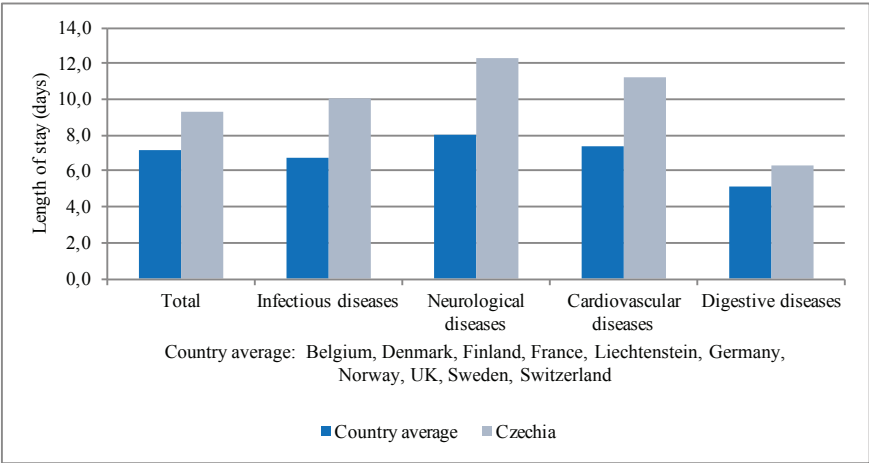


Source: OECD (2019a); ÚZIS (2019); VZP ČR (2018).

Small hospitals in particular suffer from a lack of physicians, in addition to a number of other important factors, which substantially alter the nature of care they provide. Traditionally, a district hospital had to be able to provide emergency and urgent care on a large scale. The last thirty years, however, have seen a series of far-reaching changes. One such major change is the centralization of highly specialized emergent care. New medical techniques allow for substantial improvements in treatment outcomes but tend to be costly. These are usually complex procedures which require the concentration of a sufficient number of patients at a single provider so that staff can acquire and maintain adequate qualifications. In addition, in the case of injuries and emergencies, such as the treatment of heart attacks and strokes, where success depends on utilizing a short, few-hour-long ‘opportunity window’, staff qualified to perform relevant procedures need to be available continuously.

The relationship between the volume of care provided with its quality and price applies not just to highly specialized care, but also to other common examinations, surgeries, and procedures. The relationship is based on strong theoretical and experiential foundations. Minimum surgical volumes, which scientific evidence or an expert panel’s opinions deem ensuring of high-quality care, is used in multiple European countries as recommendation/statutory conditions for the given type of care or its public funding (Morche 2018). Another factor is the shortening length of stay. Hospital stay durations have been steadily decreasing. Despite a gradual and significant reduction in Czechia, the length of stay remains prolonged here, compared to other European countries (Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3: Comparison of Length of Stay and Diagnosis (2016)<sup>6</sup>**

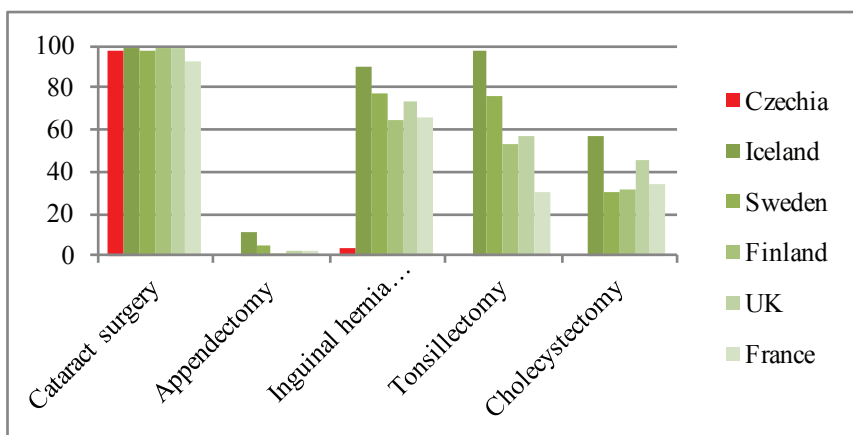


Source: Eurostat (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Arithmetic mean length of hospital stays in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, Switzerland.

Another major trend is day surgery. While some specialties in Czechia (for example ophthalmology) have made the transition, day surgery remains uncommon in most specialties (Fig. 4).

**Fig. 4: Percentage of Day Surgeries (2017)<sup>7</sup>**



Source: OECD (2019b); OECD (2018).

Another trend not yet prominent in Czechia, is the reduction of avoidable admissions. These primarily involve patients with chronic conditions admitted with deterioration. Deterioration, however, tends to set in long before the patient's condition declines to the point that they need in-patient treatment. A good outpatient care system is able to detect deterioration in time and prevent hospital stay. If the patient's problem is treated earlier, the patient avoids admission, which is risky specifically for elderly patients, and the system saves money.

In short, small hospitals in Czechia struggle with a shortage of physicians and face an outflow of patients in need of emergent inpatient care at the same time. This trend is likely to continue. The only solution is structural transformation resulting in a lower number of hospitals which provide continuous emergent inpatient care. This long-standing need has been highlighted by experience with inpatient care for Covid-19 patients, requiring respiratory support, including lung ventilation. According to the Clinical Group of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic, such patients should be treated in hospitals which are able to provide *lege artis* care for them, including intensive care (in this case, ventilation) while safely delivering the same care to non-Covid patients. This recommendation logically concentrates technically demanding emergent care in a smaller number of hospitals, while enabling hospitals unable to provide such care due to their size and available human

<sup>7</sup> The percentage of day surgeries performed in Czechia is zero for appendectomy, tonsillectomy and cholecystectomy.

resources, to render other necessary care. The different roles of individual types of hospitals need to be defined also in the post-pandemic period.

### *Suggestions*

The reasons above have generated a need to cut the number of hospitals providing non-stop emergent inpatient care. It should be noted that, given the expected higher demand for health care due to the ageing population, the principal objective of the transformation is the concentration of capacities, better division of labour, and consequently better use of capacities and personnel, and not an overall reduction in number of hospitals.

### *Other Countries*

Some European countries have adopted a radical approach preceded by a long societal debate and careful planning. Denmark, for example, reduced the number of hospitals providing emergent inpatient care from 40 to 21. The number of inhabitants per one such hospital grew from 110,000 to 270,000. The reform went hand in hand with major investments in the modernization of hospitals and the establishment of a national telemedicine support system for patients and 46 urgent care clinics managed by GPs able to deal with all outpatient urgent issues on a continuous basis (Christiansen 2018).

The Danish example is often cited, but specific in its consistency and centrally managed national health system. Similar measures are being gradually adopted across all European countries, including countries with significantly decentralized health systems. One such example is the debate and preparations for the transformation in Germany (Berger 2018). The Slovak plan of ‘hospital stratification’ is equally interesting for Czechia, fully prepared, but postponed for the time being. The growing shortage of staff in the country, particularly physicians in smaller hospitals, and the fact that a significant proportion of hospitals have been suffering investment and operational losses, called for action. The Slovak Association of Health Insurance Companies created in April 2018 a working group of representatives of the Slovak Ministries of Health and Finance, health insurance companies, and an independent consultant. The group’s recommendation, referred to as hospital stratification, suggested concentrating urgent care in a smaller number of hospitals, the gradual reduction of acute beds from the current 32,000 to 26,000 beds, and the guarantee of care availability and higher quality care (for more details see [health.gov.sk](http://health.gov.sk)).

## *Hospitals with Emergent Inpatient Care Availability*

What will the post-transformation situation look like in Czechia? Emergent inpatient care will, of course, continue to be delivered by university hospitals and large regional hospitals. District hospitals will be gradually split into those where continuous emergent care at least in basic specializations<sup>8</sup> and for less complicated cases needs to be provided for accessibility reasons, and hospitals which will no longer have to supply such demanding services which will become community hospitals (see below).

This change is often opposed based on an argument about care accessibility. Evidence suggests that the direct transfer of severe urgent cases by emergency medical services to specialized hospitals yields better treatment outcomes compared to patient transfer to the nearest hospital (Knowles 2018; Widimský 2000, 2003). The fundamental question is whether Czechia needs to have a hospital delivering 24/7 patient admission and high-quality care in the above-mentioned basic specialties in every district in the country, in order to ensure the availability of emergent and urgent inpatient care, and whether the Czech healthcare system is capable of this, given its personnel and funding, now and particularly in the future. Today's reality and this publication yield a clear answer to the first question. We could also refer to, for example, the 2019 review comparing the situation and reforms ensuring the availability of urgent care in Denmark, England, France, Germany, and the Netherlands (Baier et al. 2019). The expected financial balance of the Czech health system is clearly illustrated, for example, by presentations from a seminar the Chamber of Commerce held in October 2019 (Hospodářská komora České republiky 2020).

This does not mean that the inhabitants of every district are not entitled to accessible urgent services. The solution is provision of urgent care at a reasonable distance from the patient's home, including the capacity to assess the patient's condition and decide about local treatment or transfer by emergency medical services to a specialist provider. Hospitals appear to be a good place to provide such urgent services in Czechia – both hospitals which are able to provide non-stop emergent inpatient care, and community hospitals treating less severe urgent cases usually in a limited time scope. In other words, high-quality urgent services do not require the background of a hospital which delivers non-stop inpatient care in all basic specialties. Other countries often provide urgent care in specialized centres run by GP associations, such as walk-in urgent care clinics or *Portalpraxen* in Germany.

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<sup>8</sup> Internal medicine, surgery, gynecology, intensive care, supplemented with laboratory tests and imaging methods such as ultrasound and X-ray, including computed tomography.

## *Community Hospitals*

Hospitals which will not be part of a network providing emergent and urgent inpatient care round-the-clock can deal with understaffing and financial problems in a number of ways, while providing locally needed high-quality services. In addition to planned and follow-up care they may deliver urgent care to a limited extent and for a limited time. We suggest these hospitals be referred to as ‘community hospitals’.

The minimalist version of a community hospital consists of an internal medicine ward, surgery run on a day basis, specialized outpatient services, follow-up or long-term inpatient care, and ideally of home care, including chronic illness management services. In reality, this minimalist version will include inpatient and other health services in most hospitals which are sufficiently staffed, paid by health insurance companies, and where there is demand for services. The key is removing the duty to provide continuous emergent and urgent inpatient services, except admitted patients. The transfer of an acute inpatient surgical department to a day surgery alone can save about a third of the staff, as evident, for example, from the transformation of the Ostrov hospital (personal interviews with the hospital management).

Experience from other countries shows that hospitals which have reduced the scope of acute inpatient services and become community hospitals are able to stabilize in terms of personnel and finances, and provide needed health services in their catchment area, including urgent care, being it in collaboration with GPs or independently. An example is the transformation of several hospitals around Manchester (Rochdale Infirmary, Trafford General Hospital, and Altrincham Hospital – see Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust). These facilities have stopped providing care for complex, emergent cases and focus on routine, urgent care (for a limited time), simple internal admissions as well as community prevention programmes, namely integrated home care for patients with chronic conditions, and planned day surgeries.

Such a transformation is conditioned by staff motivation and continuing professional development, among other things, which may be encouraged by regular clinical days and staff internships in specialized hospitals. Staff mobility is easy particularly within regional networks of hospitals run or owned by the same entity (e.g., regional government). Mutually beneficial cooperation can also be set up between hospitals run or owned by different entities. Community hospitals can play an important role in early transfer and follow-up care provided to patients stabilized in specialized hospitals, as well as in integrated care of the chronically ill.



## ***Recommendations***

- It is impossible to preserve the current number of hospitals providing acute inpatient care 24/7 in terms of available staff, nor is it desirable in terms of quality of care and efficient use of resources. The solution is to divide smaller hospitals into hospitals which need to maintain the ability to provide round-the-clock acute inpatient care in order to secure availability of such care, and other, community hospitals which will be relieved of this obligation.
- The selection of hospitals required to ensure the 24/7 availability of acute inpatient care has to be based on a careful modelling of transport times and necessary capacity of the hospitals. It also needs to take into account the increasing need for health services by the ageing population.
- The network of hospitals providing acute care should be designed liberally. The minimum (absolute lowest) option should be defined centrally under the Czech Ministry of Health, while any expansion, adjustment, and development should be based on regional needs reflected in the negotiations of providers and health insurance companies. The minimum network needs to be defined before hospitals which have not undergone transformation begin to close down due to unsolved problems.

# Freedom of Speech in the Time of Covid-19

*Viktória Jančošková*

**Abstract:** Current political developments in the Central Eastern Europe region demonstrate that even thirty years after the fall of communism we have not completely shed the remains of autocracy and censorship. In recent years, we have witnessed a shrinking democratic space and verbal or physical attacks against members of the civic sector and the media. Protection of the democratic state and freedom of expression have therefore become a priority for the European Union. Even before the pandemic, the state of media independence and freedom represented one of the major structural differences between Western and Central European democracies. Now, with the Covid-19 pandemic and implementation of emergency powers, the situation has become even worse. This is bad news for the entire Union. The trend showing that freedom of speech is not granted has been confirmed by the latest World Press Freedom Index measuring the level of media freedom (RWB 2020).

**Keywords:** Democracy, Freedom of Speech, Independent Media, Covid-19 Pandemic

## *Introduction*

The media play an irreplaceable role in public life. They inform, educate, and perform a watchdog role in democratic societies where they unveil corruption and abuses of public office. Free and balanced news, and pluralism of the media are tools for critical assessment of developments in society. Truthfully informed citizens are less inclined to believe fake news, and they take a more objective view of public affairs. The World Press Freedom Index publishes annual reports on the state of independent media, rule of law and transparency. Although Europe is still considered to be the safest place for journalistic work, the freedom of media here also displays a downward trend. This is caused by the growing popularity and spread of fake news, the rise of new technologies, and an increasingly frequent disregard for democratic principles by politicians. Finally, it will be the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic which will further weaken the existence of independent media and upset the balance of the media market.

Independent media play a pivotal role in post-communist countries. It is through investigative journalism that people learn about corruption scandals, and frequently also about links between political powerholders and organised crime. In November 2019, we commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the reunification of Europe. This, on the one hand, marked the successful integration

of post-communist countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures and the liberalisation of their markets. On the other hand, their democratic institutions were still fragile and affected by a high level of corruption. Added to this were strong political pressures and influence of economic groups on independent institutions, including the media. This is especially true of the central European region, with its recent trend towards a weakening of civil society and media freedom, and a disruption of checks and balances; mainly true of Hungary and Poland, the countries denounced by EU institutions as restricting the freedom of the media, judiciary, and NGOs. The failure to observe rule of law principles could lead to the loss of the voting right or of access to EU funds. However, the probability that this would happen is close to zero as such decision would have to be unanimously voted by the entire EU Council. At the time of the finalisation of this contribution, the EU was holding its European summit, which decided on whether to make the next 2021–2027 budget directly conditional on the observance of the rule of law and on appropriate sanction mechanisms.

### ***The Desire to Control the Media***

Although media freedom is generally decreasing, this phenomenon is very uneven. While media in the West, especially in Scandinavia, are ranked as very independent, with strong legal enforcement to protect journalists from attacks, the press in the CEE region is, on the contrary, facing control by the government, hatred, and stigmatisation. First and foremost, the fragile democratic traditions, high levels of corruption, and the desire to control and sometimes own the media market makes it easier for politicians to massage the public opinion. Already back in 2017, journalists from the Visegrad countries pointed to the deteriorating situation, mainly as a result of politicians taking over the control of public spaces. ‘We know that the absence of independent media would lead to the creation of a monopoly of power in our countries that would take away what remains of the freedoms of citizens’, they warned in the adopted declaration (ČTK 2017).

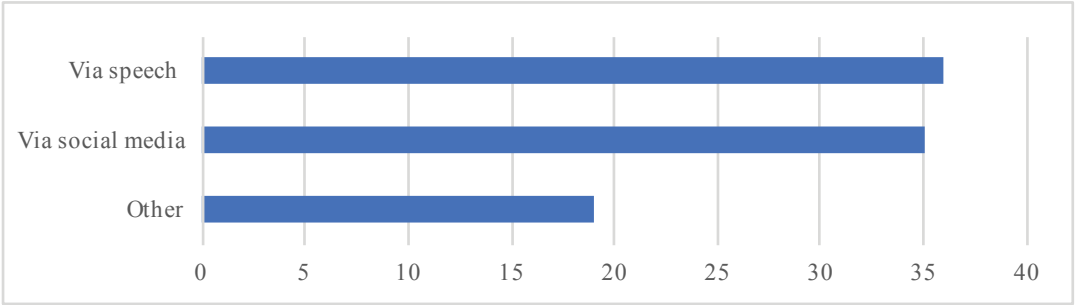
Almost exactly a year later, the murders of investigative journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée shook Slovakia and the whole of Europe. Jan Kuciak was on the track of ties between the criminal mafia group ‘Ndrangheta and prominent figures of the then ruling party SMER. These assassinations caused a political earthquake in the Slovak politics, and exposed monstrous corruption and a rotten justice system. In general, Slovak journalists had long been the targets of verbal attacks by politicians who took control of the media market through oligarchs. The mere fact that the then Prime Minister Robert Fico called journalists ‘dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes’ (Tódová 2016) speaks volumes of how public officials perceived the journalists.

In Czechia, 30% of commercial media are owned by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš. Although a

very professional public service television deserves respect, there is a genuine threat of political control, as the Parliament determines the composition of the television board. This fact, along with open hatred and verbal attacks by President Miloš Zeman towards the media, are causing critical journalists to leave the main outlets. At one press briefing, the President showed up with a mock submachine gun, thus sending an indirect message on how to deal with critical journalists (Deník N 2017). Also, because of the attitude of politicians, Czechia dropped from the eighteenth to the fortieth place of the World Press Freedom Index over the last five years.

Hungary is in an even worse situation. Public television is the mouthpiece of the government. As a reward for positively reporting on the government’s actions, and for slandering and criticising the opposition and civil society, it receives 100 billion forints (EUR 280 million) annually (Csikász 2019). According to the Index, Hungary is ranked eighty-ninth in the World Press Freedom Index. In Poland, journalists can be sentenced to a year in prison for defamation, even though the civil code offers citizens all the protection they need if they are defamed. The ruling party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), has secured control over public service TV broadcasting, through the direct appointment of its chief officer by the government.

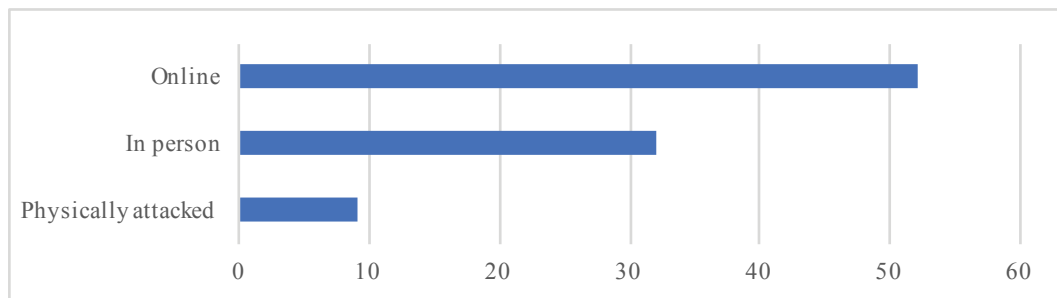
**Fig. 1: Forms of Direct Criticism of Journalists by Politicians in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>9</sup>**



Source: Selva (2020).

<sup>9</sup> The figures reflect the number of respondents who chose every option.

**Fig. 2: Ways in Which Journalists in Central and Eastern Europe Have Been Harassed<sup>10</sup>**



Source: Selva (2020).

### ***Covid-19 Highlights the Lack of a Free Press in V4***

Each crisis has brought to light differences in how individual member states perceive security challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic is no exception. This applies not only to different opinions on how to re-start the economy — on where solidarity ends and responsibility takes over — but also to differences in imposing restrictions by individual countries. Some countries perceive the pandemic as a good opportunity to centralise their government's powers and to restrict democratic space.

The most alarming instance of this was the passage of the legislation on ruling by decree in Hungary. Without a time limitation, such rule could last for months, maybe years — just as the state of emergency declared by Hungary in 2015 in connection with the migration crisis. Hungary has since terminated emergency powers but became the most criticised state in the EU for the measure it took to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. The fact is that considering the ruling Fidesz party's 2/3 majority, it was not really necessary; however, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used it to skilfully silence parliamentary opposition. In a similar situation, independent media could substitute for the silenced parliament, especially the voice of the opposition, but under the new legislation the media could be sued for spreading 'fake news'. Understandably, this is aimed mainly against independent media, who are critical of the government.

An attempt was made also in Czechia to use the state of emergency as a test of society's view on strengthening the powers of PM Andrej Babiš. The initiative of the latter's defence minister was strongly criticised by the opposition, and Babiš denied having been involved. However, the media subsequently uncovered that a document to this effect had been drafted for some time at his instruction.

<sup>10</sup> The figures reflect the number of respondents who chose every option.

Unlike in Hungary, Babiš does not have a constitutional majority and cannot set the parliament aside. The Senate is an additional guarantor of democracy, which Babiš would like to see abolished under the argument that it is redundant and too costly.

Poland, with its highest Covid-19 infection rate among the V4 countries, did not declare a state of emergency, but instead the government restricted many personal freedoms. This was motivated by the upcoming presidential election, in which the governing PiS party wanted to be held at the earliest date possible. PiS was aware that the approaching recession caused by the pandemic could change voters' mood, to the detriment of their candidate, Andrzej Duda. Duda narrowly won in July 2020 after the campaign was questioned as unfair. During the campaign, incumbent president Andrzej Duda misused the coronavirus crisis for his own representation, while the ban on public gatherings prevented his rivals from running their own campaigns. The confidence of the Poles in their ability to handle not only the pandemic but also the upcoming elections was boosted by the propaganda of the state television. The media purposefully disseminated reports on adverse developments in the West and the West's inability to come to terms with the crisis.

As for Slovakia, the breakout of the pandemic caught the country during the change of government, after the February 2020 parliamentary elections. Otherwise, there is no doubt that the departing socialists, linked to numerous corruption scandals, would have tried to abuse the situation. Thus, right from the beginning, the new government had to fight not only the virus, but also divergent opinions within its own coalition on how to handle the pandemic and rescue the economy. It was criticised not only for the absolute ban imposed on the movement of persons during Easter holidays, but also for quarantining some Romani settlements and testing their inhabitants with military doctors rather than general healthcare workers. Similar to Bulgaria, which applied the same approach to the Romani population, doubts were raised about respect for human rights. However, perhaps also due to these drastic restrictions, Slovakia ultimately reported the lowest number of deaths and persons infected with Covid-19 in the EU.

### ***The Virus of the Suppression of Freedom Is Spreading Also in the Balkans***

The abuse of political power and a shrinking democratic space have long been observed also in the Balkans, where Covid-19 is used as one more reason to centralise information. Journalists in Slovenia complained of greatly restricted access to information, during which they received information from the government only in writing. It was a very convenient way to dodge irritating questions. PM Janez Janša reacted aggressively to journalists who requested information about increased salaries of members of his government, which had just taken power at the time of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Bulgaria, with its shocking 111<sup>th</sup> position in the ranking of media freedom, adopted repressive legislation prescribing imprisonment for four years and a fine of EUR 5,000 for spreading fake news about the pandemic. The lack of media freedom and rampant corruption brought thousands of people to the streets of Bulgarian cities in July 2020. Bulgaria was thus facing a contentious autumn before the 2021 parliamentary elections.

Journalists in Serbia speak publicly about the unbearably worsening and dangerous environment for the press since the rise to power of the former prime minister, and since 2017 the current president, Aleksandar Vučić. There is an increasing centralisation of information, finger-pointing, and brutal interventions against journalists, such as the one against Serbian journalist Ana Lalić. For criticising the inadequate facilities of the Vojvodina hospital and the lack of protection for the nursing staff against Covid-19, she was arrested on a complaint filed by the hospital (Euractiv 2020).

This survey could thus go on country by country. Worsening conditions for the work of journalists further deepen the already existing erosion of the rule of law in the EU and its region. The danger is that this is taking place in the name of protecting the population at the time when society has greater understanding for restrictions. It is clear from a number of open letters addressed by journalists from the CEE region to European institutions that the situation is more than alarming (Euractiv 2020).

### ***Freedom of Speech Needs EU's Attention, Support and Recognition***

In the wake of political developments and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the discussion on the respect, protection, and promoting pluralism and freedom of the media is gaining momentum in the EU. As early as March 2020, the EC announced a EUR 5.1 million aid package to support pluralism and media freedom. This covers projects to promote cross-border investigative journalism and special monitoring aimed at identifying threats to media pluralism. As Věra Jourová, Commissioner for Values and Transparency, said: 'Democracy cannot function without free and independent media. Journalists should be able to work and write without fear. These projects are just the beginning' (Hendrych 2020).

Obviously, support must have not only a financial but also a moral dimension. It is therefore essential that any abuse of the situation, aimed to restrict the democratic space as has been the case with Covid-19, elicits an immediate response by the representatives of EU institutions. The European Parliament should give on-going attention to the complaints filed by several press freedom organisations which allege restrictions on the free flow of information during the Covid-19 pandemic. The most important thing, however, is financial support for education and, consequently, for the strengthening media literacy, awareness of the freedom of expression, and objective assessment of information.



Despite the Covid-19 crisis, the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 should not omit a further increase in funding for independent media, because through them, a conscious civil society can be built, resistant to propaganda and disinformation. This is key especially now, as many independent media outlets will fight for survival and cannot rely on financial support from governments when it comes to the distribution of advertising from the state's institutions. The media also needs permanent attention from the Union's institutions; just as in their respective countries, they often cannot rely on a judiciary system which is in the hands of the government. This was the case of the murdered journalist in Slovakia, when a special mission by the European Parliament put pressure on the police and the prosecution, leading to an independent investigation. The media are an integral part of democracy, therefore, all measures to support them should be taken, because even in extraordinary times certain lines should not be crossed. We cannot afford to take damage on all fronts, especially not on the front of democracy, which is already facing many challenges.

### ***Recommendations***

- Promote legislation which will make media less dependent on political garniture and make them less vulnerable.
- Any attack on the media should be condemned and punished, and the state of play of the media should be discussed annually in national parliaments.
- Consider introducing a media ombudsman as they do in the Nordic countries, for example in Sweden.
- Support media literacy in the education system, and in general support a wider awareness of importance of independent media.

# Information Disorder: Implications for National Safety

*Jonáš Syrovátka*

**Abstract:** The path-breaking changes in the information space, taking place in the first decades of the twenty-first century, have had a profound effect on all areas of state activity, including security. A wide range of protagonists have utilised the space of *information disorder*, including terrorists, authoritarian states and populist politicians, to attack western democracies. In light of the fact that change in the information space is irreversible, nations and societies have to accommodate to it and find measures which will enable its smooth operations under the new conditions. This will be a long-term process, which requires the engagement of not only state institutions but also civic society, private businesses and the media. Only these types of cooperation will prepare democratic nations for the challenges connected with the new situation in the information space.

**Keywords:** Security, Information Space, Civic Society, Propaganda, Disinformation

## *Introduction*

The coronavirus Covid-19 – a disease that has swept the entire globe – shows us again just how interconnected the world is. This was noticeable especially in the information space, which has long crossed country borders and language barriers. An interesting illustration of this fact is a conspiracy theory whose variations have begun to emerge around the globe and which names the billionaire and philanthropist Bill Gates as the agent behind the outbreak of the pandemic (Wakefield 2020). The WHO has, unsurprisingly, warned both about the disease itself and against the ‘infodemic’ – overloaded information space, where hoaxes and misinformation can easily spread, which can significantly worsen the situation (World Health Organization 2020).

Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic is just one case in a series of instances where the spread of falsehoods across the convoluted information space – referred to as *information disorder* by some researchers (Council of Europe n.d.) – has had serious implications for countries and communities. Take for example Brexit or the 2016 US presidential election, both affected by misinformation in the online space as well as by the ability of some of the candidates (Donald Trump especially) to make the most of new communication platforms and thus push the media – the established chief regulator and moderator of the public debate – into the background (Jackson 2018). Or we could go a few years further back to point out the impact of information component in Russian military operations in

eastern Ukraine, probably best illustrated by the disinformation campaign after a Malaysian Airlines plane was downed in 2014 (Euvsdesinfo.eu 2019).

The above, together with many other examples indicate the need for Western democratic countries and communities to reflect the state information space is now in. Unless measures are adopted, the countries will become an easy target for external or internal agents interested in destabilizing them. The entities have – as briefly described in the first part of this paper – already been taking full advantage of the current state of information environment. The second part of this text will, on the other hand, emphasise the fact that democracies are equipped with multiple measures helping them to face the challenge. As pointed out in the final paragraphs, however, while the measures may reinforce the country resilience, they must not interfere with the pluralist public debate, which is a necessary component of liberal democracy.

### ***New Threats in the New Information Environment***

The beginning of the twenty-first century was marked by significantly accelerated digital revolution. The (almost) global access to Internet and the improvement and reduction of the cost of computers and mobile phones interconnected local information spaces. The threshold to the imaginary information market, previously largely dominated by the media, also dropped significantly. People are no longer passive recipients of news; they can now create and disseminate it themselves. This paved way for spontaneous movements and their mobilization, which began to participate in politics. Although these changes have undeniably had a number of positive impacts, such as pressure for greater governance transparency, easier articulation of the interests of hitherto marginalized groups or a platform for discussing global issues, they were soon utilised by state and non-state actors to promote their goals. The actors found it easier to spread propaganda in the new information space, confuse enemies with disinformation campaigns, and mobilize their potential allies abroad.

The first to take advantage of possibilities offered by the digital information space were the weaker players, who tried to compensate for the lack of standard capacities by transferring the conflict to another domain. One of the first instances this tactic proved successful was the 2006 Lebanon War. Hezbollah had little chance of winning a physical clash, and therefore decided to make the most of online propaganda, which ultimately led to their political victory.<sup>11</sup> Other terrorist organisations fighting a much stronger enemy adopted a similar strategy. Probably the best-known case is the Islamic State (IS), who has put considerable effort into online propaganda. It has been able, thanks to this, to raise funds from supporters, recruit new members, form collaborator cells, and inspire

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<sup>11</sup> For details see Calb and Saivetz (2007).

terrorist attacks around the world (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr and Moreng 2016). It is expected that other extremists, including those inspired by ideologies other than radical Islam, will follow the IS strategy.

A milestone in using the new information space to achieve geopolitical goals was the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, where influence operations in the online space played an important role. Similar activities were not limited to this conflict, as Russia began using disinformation campaigns and propaganda to increase its influence around the world (Kiles 2016). The advantages of such activities are their low cost and the difficulty of tracing their initiators in the confusing information space. Furthermore, even if the initiators are identified, information operations often go unpunished, as Western countries lack adequate means to respond and, very often, the will to escalate the situation ‘only’ based on developments in the online space. This is partly why other authoritative countries such as China and Iran have been making an increasing use of the tool. It is important to bear in mind that operations in the information space serve these regimes both as a foreign policy tool and to maintain the local legitimacy of the power elite.<sup>12</sup>

The potential of the digital information space is nevertheless exploited by, in addition to authoritarian regimes and extremist movements, actors operating within democratic countries. An example is politicians abusing disinformation to discredit their rivals, among whom they often include mainstream media (Chatterjee and Krekó 2020). The practice is not limited to politics, as it is becoming common among corporate competitors (Novák 2020). The problem is also connected to social networking services, where falsehoods can spread fast and easy.

### ***How to Survive in the New Information Space?***

The change in the information space is a fact that is here to stay. Instead of trying to restore the ‘good old times’, existing legal norms, strategies, and institutions need to be adapted to the new situation. Given our insufficient understanding of how the new information environment works and how it impacts individuals and society, it would be unwise to call for quick, simple, and drastic measures. Their unintended consequences often only exacerbate the situation. Another reason for patience is the fact that truly effective measures need not only to be adopted by countries but require long-term cooperation of a variety of stakeholders, including the media, civil society, and corporations.

State institutions need to adapt to the new information environment primarily in the way they communicate with the public. Gone is the time when, thanks to the media coverage, their public announcements would often trigger social debates. The information space is, however, populated

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<sup>12</sup> This is dealt with within the concept of information autocracies (see Guriev and Treisman 2019).

now by a number of other actors intent on their own agenda, and therefore the ability to effectively communicate ‘own topics’ is one of the key skills for gaining influence in society. Communication therefore needs to be a natural part of the measures adopted by state institutions, not a complementary activity. Long-term, consistent, factually accurate and comprehensible communication can help them to enforce their message in the information space, and contribute to building trust between the state and its citizens. Inspiring examples in Czechia are the way the communication of the Czech Army and the Security Information Service has changed in recent years. Although these institutions deal with security and are therefore inherently withdrawn and secretive, they realized they could not operate in the new information space without being able to directly address the public. They became more active on social networks and began sending their representatives to the media and public events more often.

Although departmental efforts are vital if state communication is to improve, an even more important factor is coordination at the top levels of management decisions, which requires the implementation of the goal in strategic documents. Another important requirement is the professionalization of communication and the resulting ability to respond to the latest trends in communication. At the same time, state institutions must avoid yielding to political influence or becoming mere promoters of the agenda of a government agency. This is why, for example, each ministry should have its own permanent spokesperson to communicate topics pertaining to the department’s long-term activities, who would not deal with everyday polemics of the relevant minister.<sup>13</sup>

Another key measure the state needs to apply is the adaptation of the education system to the new information environment. Here - more than anywhere else - the relevant institutions need to be open to debate with the public and the private sector. Raising critical, socially aware, and moral citizens is the key to ensuring the state’s resilience to all types of risks. Although education (and better state communication) is the mantra of all discussions about the new information space challenges, these are complex and therefore long-lasting changes. Therefore, it is necessary to pay close attention to measures which can be applied immediately at the state level. One such measure is the exercise of state sovereignty in cyberspace. This specifically involves consistent penalisation of legal offenses, such as the spread of false alarms or inciting hatred against particular social groups online. Although Czech courts have issued several sentences in connection with the crimes, the police and prosecutors need to continue improving their competence to duly document and prosecute this type of crime.

An altogether different situation is when disinformation or propaganda is spread by other countries. Such cases cannot be ignored or trivialized. On the contrary, they must be resolutely protested against. Aggression in the information space needs to be treated as any other hostile act to which it is necessary to respond. The response should not be restricted to the information domain only but

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13 Other suggestions for state communication improvements are available for example in Syrovátka, Dušková and Pinkas (2019).

can – depending on the severity – have a number of forms, from economic sanctions, through the withdrawal of diplomatic staff, to retaliation.<sup>14</sup>

Preparations of such measures, however, need to consider the limited capacity of Czechia. Similar incidents should thus be dealt with within organisations such as the European Union or NATO. The latter in particular should broaden its perception of the concept of aggression and put in place mechanisms which allow member states to respond jointly to this type of security threats. The EU has a number of activities at its disposal to face risks associated with the new information space. The most important include measures forcing the operators of social networking services to make their platforms more transparent and to find ways to prevent their misuse for misinformation and hatred. The EU also plays a major role in building an international community of disinformation and propaganda researchers and activists, just as it does in situations where disinformation is spread by member state governments themselves.

The media, civil society, and research institutions, led by universities, contribute greatly to identifying the risks which could arise in connection with the new situation in the information space, evaluating their impact, and seeking innovative solutions. Activists and researchers, it is important to note, warned of the possible effects of misinformation on the debate in democratic states long before the topic was established in the public debate. In addition to monitoring the information space and verifying the claims posted, civil society has also launched a number of interesting initiatives, such as educating students through board games (Vinklová 2020), holding debates with senior citizens about the media (Golis 2019) or appealing to companies not to advertise on disinformation websites (Zikmundová 2020). The last area showcases the importance of cooperation with companies. Their influence will soon show in connection with the Stop Hate for Profit campaign, which aims to force Facebook to streamline its approach to misinformation spread on this platform by temporarily suspending advertising (Stophateforprofit.org 2020).

Civil society also needs to be able to (self-) critically assess the impact of measures responding to the new situation in the information space and evaluate whether they do more harm than good. Research has shown that the media's efforts to disprove marginal conspiracy theories only accelerate their spread in cyberspace (Tsfati et al. 2020), and insufficiently explained appeals to think critically can drive people into the clutches of conspiracy websites (STEM 2019). Yet another reason for caution is the fact that fighting misinformation can easily serve as a disguise for attempts to push undesirable opinions out of public debate and promote particular political interests. Civil society needs to intervene against such tendencies just as it does against the disseminators of disinformation.

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<sup>14</sup> Israel has set an interesting precedent in this regard, bombing the area from which the cyber attacks had been launched (Hay Newman 2019).

### ***Recommendations: How to Understand and Respond to the Change in the Information Space***

- The new information space characterized by confusion, decentralization, and fragmentation is a fact which needs to be recognized. The measures should be aimed at the adaptation of legal norms and of institutions to the new situation, and not an unfeasible restoration of the ‘good old days’. To accelerate the process, fatalistic and emotional language should be avoided and emphasis should be on sober and factual assessment of risks, which need to be addressed, and the description of the steps which need to be taken.
- Although the new information environment poses significant security challenges, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is also beneficial for society. This is why each measure taken or initiative launched need to be carefully considered, and their possible unintended effects discussed. Such an approach will help us avoid steps which could actually impede democracy. The basic principle of this debate must be the fact that ensuring security only means maintaining a democratic system in the new conditions, not an end in itself.
- The confusion of the information space has been exploited by both extremist groups (Islamic fundamentalists primarily) and authoritarian states to attack Western democracies. This fact needs to be recognized and cyberspace viewed as another area where powers clash. An equally urgent threat to democracy is, nonetheless, posed by domestic actors – politicians and companies – abusing the new state of the information environment to strengthen their own influence or increase profits.
- Due to the complexity of the risks associated with the change in the information space, the search for adequate responses is a challenge requiring the participation of multiple actors. Adoption of adequate measures and the setting of standards reflecting the change in the information space are only possible if there is cooperation between state institutions, multinational organisations, civil society, and companies. All these entities need to learn to communicate with each other, as they share the same goal of maintaining a stable democratic system.
- The measures need to be general, not limited to a single specific threat or actor, as the information space and related risks evolve dynamically. All the measures adopted, therefore, should be focused on strengthening the resilience of society through the education of critical, informed, and responsible citizens.



# Better Results Might Be Close at Hand So Why Not Seize Them? Why and How to Segment?

*Otto Eibl*

**Abstract:** This text deals with segmentation. First, it introduces the meaning of segmentation, *i.e.*, division of the market into smaller and meaningful parts. Then it looks into various criteria and approaches that are commonly used to divide the market (sociodemographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioural criteria). Finally, it discusses so-called personas, *i.e.*, certain fictional characters that represent individual segments and which help political parties and trade companies mix the instruments and tone of marketing and communication campaigns better.

**Keywords:** Marketing, Campaign, Segmentation, Personas, Market

## *Introduction*

Any person, with at least elementary experience in marketing, knows that no campaign is going to work without segmentation, targeting and positioning. Or, it will but not to its best capacity. Moreover, it will be (sometimes even many more times) more expensive, uninteresting and will very likely blend with a plethora of additional impulses flooding us as we live in a time abundant with information but poor in attention. It is difficult but not impossible to win the attention of voters (consumers). More important than trying to invent ultra-witty, ultra-cool and maybe even ultra-weird instruments that could catch someone's attention is to know who we actually are here for and what we want to do for them. It might be an absolutely trivial question but an honest answer to it is crucial. This chapter deals with segmentation and how to perform it in a way that it truly makes the marketing strategy work as expected.

## *Why Segmentation?*

Segmentation helps utilize the money spent for the campaign in a more effective way so that the campaign meets the target. Its aim is to divide the market into smaller units, to identify the 'suitable' ones and, in the end, to produce a message tailored to the target groups which will be accepted by these groups rather than the competitors' (or other) messages (Cf. Grigsby 2018: 122-125; McDonald and Dunbar 2012: 9). In general, it is clear that the more heterogeneous the target group is, the more



diverse the interests, needs and opinions of its members might be. Such an environment then increases the risk that our message will drown and become irrelevant for the majority of the (unsegmented) audience. And if our message is uninteresting, we will be uninteresting as well.

If we target the groups better and work with them more actively, then it is more likely that the consumers show a positive response at the moment when they meet the advertised activities in the market (Cf. Hague et al. 2016: 221-222). It saves energy, time and money as they are not wasted on groups that are closed for the company or even show hostile behaviour towards it.

Segmentation helps in the following areas (Cf. Yesbeck n.d.; Sreenivashan 2019):

1. We are able to produce better (because tailored) marketing messages. If we know who we are addressing, we can choose a way to say things better. We will very likely be more specific and avoid general statements and vague language, *i.e.*, communication that would be ignored.
2. If we are aware of who we are talking to, we will target better and choose the strategic tools that will work better in the given context.
3. The right way of segmentation saves time, energy and money. In the real world and (even more so) in digital platforms it only targets those who the message is intended for – in this way, we get a better response for less money.
4. The more specific the message is, the higher the chance that it stands out from the competitors. Those who know their audience will not only prepare and package the product itself better for them but will also choose an adequate communication frame.
5. To focus on the result and work with one or more accurately defined groups. Long-term work is more meaningful than disorganized fluctuation between various groups. Consistency in communication helps reinforce the existing relations and create affinity.

### ***How to Segment?***

The process of segmentation should be based on high quality data (although we need to say that it does not necessarily have to use an exact scientific discipline) and it consists in the division of a large whole – population – in accordance with pre-set criteria (advanced statistical instruments, e.g., factor and cluster analysis, might help as well). In other words, it is the division of the target market into groups using selected characteristics common for them. Since they will be discussed in more detail below, let us only state that it might be specific needs, interests, behaviour, place or demographic data. It is important to be aware of the fact that at this moment the individual segments do not say anything

about the voters themselves, they rather provide information on the characteristics of the market where the client aims to act and impact. A political party or a candidate (or anyone, in general, who tries to offer any product or service) receives an idea about what kind of target audiences are available in the market and how large the groups are. Properly implemented segmentation is the starting point for better understanding of (the wishes and needs of) voters and for choosing the best marketing strategy (and communication mix) so that it makes sense. Segmentation is significant as it contributes to designing the campaign as it incessantly reminds us of who we are talking to, what these people want and how to deliver it to them.

### ***What to Use for Segmentation?***

Segmentation can be carried out with the help of a number of criteria that should be used in a way that makes sense and helps meet the defined aims. In general, segmentation criteria can be divided into four groups: sociodemographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioural (see, e.g., Kotler and Keller 2012: 214-229; Dolnicar et al. 2018: 41-45; McDonald and Dunbar 2013: 11-13; Yesbeck n.d.). Segmentation based on sociodemographic characteristics is very common and popular. It uses information that is comparatively easy to measure and can be presented as objective. These can be age, gender, family circumstances, nationality, profession, ethnicity, education, personal income, household income, etc. Although this is probably the obligatory basis for any marketing strategy, it is important to remember that such easy classification does not actually help much. If segmentation is to make sense, we need to see it in more detail and pay attention to emotions, values, feelings, attitudes, motivation, and behaviour in general. Imagine that you are a political party that aims to address women aged 25 to 40. If you put, say, 20 of them in one room, you will see how different lives they live and how different their needs are (even though they look the same in the statistics – women, 25-40): some of them have children, others do not; some of them study, others go to work, some of them have a partner, are married, others might be single. Several of them are self-employed, some of them are employees, others are on maternity leave, etc. It works in a similar way (or does not) across various segments, even when they are more narrow. Let's use first time voters as an example. Every single one can belong to a different subculture – one rides a skateboard, another one rides a bicycle, another one goes to a gym, someone listens to metal music, someone is a rapper, etc. Different things will appeal to every single one of them.

Geographic segmentation is apparently the most simple one. The customers are classified in accordance with where they are located. We can take into account a constituency, city, country, area around a certain place, but also, for example, the characteristics of a municipality (the city vs. the

country, the size of it), etc. Geographical segmentation can significantly help with planning a contact campaign and distribution of any advertising material or direct mail. Psychographic segmentation is noticeably more complicated. The classification uses personal characteristics that are related to the customers or voters personalities. These are, for example, their values, attitudes, interests, personal characteristics or lifestyle in general. Here, it is impossible to rely on objective data – in most cases it is a subjective world view and interpretation of the world. On the other hand, knowing the values of your voters and understanding their motivations (for their choice or involvement in political life in general) might be the factor that will determine the winner of elections. Psychographic factors are the ones that define what life we live and how we make decisions – not only in politics. Psychographic factors (pre)determine who we meet with and make friends with, how we select partners, where we decide to live and work, what book we decide to read or what kind of coffee we drink and where. We can state with no uncertain terms that it is also a kind of shield that determines who we let in our life and, on the contrary, a compass that suggests what we should (and want to) reach. They define whether we are a part of a ‘tribe’ (in the sense of consumer microcultures, see, e.g., Godin 2008).

The above-mentioned ways of segmentation primarily deal with the issue of *who* is the target voter or customer (or, *where* to find them). Behavioural segmentation pays attention to behaviour. It monitors for example buying habits, responses to individual (including political) brands, how people spend money, how and to what extent they engage in political life in their municipality or country, or how they ‘consume’ or perform politics. There is a question as to which of these methods is the best. The ideal and best results will be achieved by using a mix of these approaches. If you succeed in combining demographic, behavioural and psychographic factors, you will create a truly powerful and functional marketing tool that will help define and deliver the final form of what to offer. It will correctly determine communication canals and demonstrate what the final message should look like so that it resonates strongly with the target audience and produces an ideal reaction and response.

### ***There Are No Two Identical Segments***

The mere division of the market into smaller units does not necessarily mean success. We should always consider carefully the purposefulness of particular segments. The segment should be assessed in accordance with a number of criteria. The first person who defined them was Kotler who included sustainability, measurability and accessibility in them (see, e.g., Kotler and Keller 2012: 231). Later, this list was proved to be insufficient and was extended (by Kotler himself and also by many others; Cf. e.g., Grigsby 2018: 127; Kotler and Keller 2012: 231-232; Gavett 2014; for the summary of literature see Dolnicar et al. 2018: 32-22):

1. Segment should be homogeneous, its members must be similar to one another.
2. A segment (and people in it) has to be clearly distinguishable from other segments.
3. A segment has to be large enough, that means to consist of a sufficient number of voters so that it can justify investing in it and creating a special communication mix for it.
4. A segment should correspond with the capabilities of the organisation (political party) to meet the needs of the segment members.
5. It should be possible to identify the segment members in the market at first.
6. A segment should be accessible, *i.e.*, there has to be a method as to how to hit it with the help of a tailored marketing mix.

It is definitely possible to extend this catalogue with other items. One that needs to be mentioned is the competitiveness of a particular segment (e.g., Kotler and Keller 2012: 232). Also, (based on analysis) competitors take into consideration whether there are other actors that are interested in the particular segment. If there are, it is important to consider whether there can be any profit from competing for customers, or whether it is more sensible to try to identify another, perhaps even unattended segment, waiting to be served.

At the same time, the product should be sufficiently attractive or perceived as needed as there is also a scenario when all the marketing activities are established correctly but the product itself fails to meet the target audience's interests. Then, it is important to analyse the opportunities in the market, think about the organisation and answer the following questions:

7. What problems are we trying to solve?
8. What more can we offer compared to other parties? What can we do better?
9. What are we really good at?
10. Who is the person we are serving?

If the answers to these questions meet the selected segment, we can move ahead.

## ***Personas***

At the moment when the market is divided and target segments are identified, there is at least one more step to do. Based on defined segments (that can be understood as a strategic map), it is possible to define so-called personas (see Revalla 2015) that can become an everyday strategic tool. This means creating fictional characters representing particular segments (see, e.g., Hayward 2019: 48-50). When creating these characters, we need to ensure that they are credible and that their profiles are

as detailed as possible. Their profile will be based on data processed in the course of segmentation: gender, age, education, interests, number of children, favourite films, problems that they solve, etc. Moreover, personas might be established in specific circumstances and it is possible to imagine how they would act or react to the stimuli, if they were real people (on how to create personas, see, e.g., Revalla 2015; Toth 2019; Andrews 2020). This is also due to the fact that they follow *real* needs and solve *existing* problems. In this way, personas animate individual segments, give them a specific face, name, family circumstances, in short – they represent the qualitative image of a typical customer or voter (and the system of their values). By this means, they actually show the emotional and behavioural components, which are more difficult to objectify and measure (Cf. Collins 2015). Once personas are ready, they can be effectively used for the needs of political parties and a candidate (and any organisation in general) and help meet the aims concerning individual voters or customers. If it is possible to visualise a typical representative of a target group, the communication and campaign in general will be easier to create.

### ***What Else to Be Aware of?***

There are a number of mistakes that can be made during the process of segmentation (see, e.g., Tow 2020) which is why the functionality of segmentation strategy needs to be tested and the responses of target groups need to be monitored. It is therefore not the best idea to create something without a more comprehensive discussion and order its implementation straight away. It is more reasonable to keep monitoring the responses of the respondents as well as the functionality of the marketing activities in general. The most frequent mistakes are creating segments that are too small, without sufficient power to help reach the set targets, or targeting a segment that might respond to our offer very well (we might be the only ones to address it) but lacks real ‘purchasing’ power (e.g., future first time voters without the opportunity of choice, or foreigners without the right to vote in Czechia). Another mistake could be persisting with the set-up strategy after the customers’ needs (or the target group in general) change.

### ***Conclusion***

In case of marketing and the creation of a functional marketing strategy, it is important to proceed with caution and prudence, for which there are tools that can help with efficiency, help the contractor to be seen where it is actually needed and address the groups of customers who can recognize the value of the offer and for whom it makes the most sense. Some of the crucial tools are the process of segmentation and creating personas. Both of these tools increase the chance that, after the campaign that has just been carried out has been analysed, the results we receive are more satisfactory. Both

tools are similar to one other but should not be substituted for: segmentation divides the market into smaller parts based on the established criteria, while personas go deeper and have a high informative value related to the individuals who the segment consists of. Segments help with the prediction of the interest in the offered product on the market, personas help understand emotional and behavioural triggers, and the needs and motivations of individual customers who are on the market. In this way, both tools can significantly help us create and target particular messages.

### ***Recommendations***

- We need to be aware that it is impossible to please everyone and that there is no need to look for a universal message. Only a product that is attractive for the largest minority (or the sum of such groups) is needed in Czechia. There is no need to aim actively at everyone.
- Segmentation can be demanding and expensive. The expenses are not in any case useless – on the contrary! It is better to know exactly who I am communicating with (and what I want to communicate) than to ‘shoot from the hip’ and switch from one topic to another.
- A campaign has to be tested. Even here, segmentation and creating personas might significantly help – the test might be carried out on the relevant target groups only and it is possible to estimate the kind and intensity of the response even before launching the campaign itself. The market (and the customers in it) sometimes do not know what exactly they want, however, so they might reject a revolutionary innovation because they are afraid of change. There is then a need to be brave enough and demonstrate your leadership skills (which is something that most of the parties in Czechia at present lack to a great extent).
- There is not a need to push the candidate into suppressing their own personality and creating some kind of simulation (from the point of view of marketing research) of an ideal candidate that fits the target group. It is great if you succeed in this, of course, but at the moment when we aim, for example, at first time voters (which is, by the way, not an exactly suitable or ideal segment), there is no need for the candidate to start riding a skateboard or something similar. One of the negative examples that might be considered is the campaign of Freedom Union (Unie svobody, US) in 2006 which, although surprising and unorthodox, did not bring success for the party.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In 2006, US tried to address a non-conformist group of young voters by trying to change its previous conservative position on the market into a much more liberal one and present itself (in spite of being part of the government) as the party of protest. Their campaign presented such topics as legalization or at least decriminalization of soft drugs, euthanasia or graffiti. The party's posters included a pentagram and a purple colour together with a text in English ‘It's legal to (be a loser/die/be different, etc.)’, the TV ads showed completely absurd actions (e.g., lighting farts). On the whole, the campaign looked forced and unnatural and the representatives of the party were nonauthentic in the discussed topics (e.g., ‘I myself have never smoked marijuana,’ the former leader of the party stated; Kopecky 2006; Cf. Novinky.cz 2006). It needs to be said that even this unorthodox and surprising campaign did not bring success for the party.

# Positioning Muslims in Czech Integration Policy<sup>16</sup>

*Lucie Tungul*

**Abstract:** The 2015 migration crisis in Europe revealed the deep identity crisis of Czech society which reflected the increasing divergence between its national and European identities, because economic prosperity was not matched with corresponding political and social maturity. Experiencing economic growth and rising prosperity, Czechia has become a destination country to increasingly diverse migrants, some of whom come from societies where Islam is the dominant religion. Seen as poor, uneducated, and violent, Muslims often evoke fear and hostility from the majority society, who has a very limited historical experience with migration as such and with Muslims in particular. This chapter addresses the position of Muslims in Czechia in the context of its immigration policy and the domestic and foreign factors that influence the discourse and its outcomes.

**Keywords:** Czechia, Migration, Muslim, Integration, EU

## *Introduction*

International migration is a phenomenon which presents many opportunities, but also threats, to host societies. We are witnessing an increase in hostility towards migrants across the Western world; national migration laws are becoming stricter, and politicians and the media are increasingly antagonistic, especially to asylum seekers and other migrants, who they often associate with disorder and criminality (Snyder 2011). Immigrants receive attention because 1) they are not part of shared loyalty to the state; 2) they remind the nation that it emerged by assimilation and integration in the past; 3) they enrol in the social system, where they contribute but are excluded from full enjoyment of the services; and 4) the reasons of their move, which runs counter to the notion of territory in the nationalist imaginary (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Immigrants are seen as culturally ‘other’, as a potential economic and social threat to the sovereign nation because they seem to belong elsewhere.

Migration is regulated on a wide range of levels from the local, regional, and national to the supranational (the EU), international, global, and transnational. In the case of Europe, the single market and the Schengen agreement combined with the institution of European citizenship and asylum policy cooperation have been crucially important for the movement of people on the continent. Migration and the process of European integration are part of a process in which actual borders have

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declined in importance when demarcating belonging to a nation group. The post-WW2 emphasis on each person belonging somewhere and the idea that each person must belong to only one nation, seen as a privilege, was undermined by dual citizenship and the increase in transnational politics since the 1990s. The impact of new technology in the transnational space led to formation of new networks and identities, including political activities. This was possible not only because of more affordable transportation and communication, but also media (especially social media and television), easier economic connections, and trade. The availability of online streaming and satellites ‘blur connection between territory and identity [where] the territory of belonging remains regional, the territory of reference becomes national or religious... and the territory of residence is French, German, Dutch, or simply ean’ (Kastoryano 2016). This link through the revolution in communications relates to both culture and politics and affects both the host country and the experience of migration.

The EU has reacted to the challenges of having about 4% of third country nationals living in the EU by adopting principles of the EU integration policy in 2004 and the European Commission’s European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in 2011. In 2016, the European Commission adopted the Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals, which, among other things, highlighted the need to receive knowledge about the culture, values, and laws of the host country and problems of access to health care. The EU also set up the European Migration Forum, a platform facilitating dialogue between the EU institutions and civil society, the Radicalisation Awareness Network, the European Migration Network that brings together migration and asylum experts, and national contact points. The EU prepares annual reports on migration and asylum, country factsheets, and relevant studies. The principles included in the EU policy support actions in the field of language learning, introductory measures, access to employment, education and vocational training, and the fight against discrimination. They aim to support successful integration, which can be simply described as combination of openness of the host society and the migrant’s ability to speak the host country language and to ‘acquire skills needed to prosper in the dominant culture’ (Čeněk, Kompérová and Smolík 2018: 123).

### ***Czech Immigration Policy***

The number of third-country nationals in Czechia has been increasing since 2001. By August 2019, 341,496 non-EU foreigners legally lived in Czechia (more than 3% of the population), most of them from Ukraine, Vietnam, and Russia, representing 70% of all third country nationals. Over two thirds had permanent residency status; of which 57.1% had an employment status, 24.2% held



family visa,<sup>17</sup> and 12.8% study visa. Most were aged 20 to 39 years, least frequent were children — 44,674 foreigners attended Czech kindergartens, primary, and secondary schools in 2018/2019.<sup>18</sup> Most foreigners settled in Prague, followed by the Stredocesky and Jihomoravsky regions. A slight majority of foreigners were men. Their share of social welfare payments was very low: 1.425% of the total (Vláda České republiky 2019).

Despite the country shifting from being a transit to a destination country, the Czech immigration and asylum laws are ‘exceptionally inconsistent, incomprehensible, and parts of it have been declared repeatedly by the Constitutional Court as unconstitutional’ (Šimáčková 2018). The Act No. 326/1999 Coll. on the Residence of Aliens in the Territory of the Czech Republic is on average updated three times a year and is confusing even for lawyers (Pořízek 2018). The country does not seem to know whether it wants foreigners or not. Until applying for permanent residency, there are no integration requirements,<sup>19</sup> which are more extensive only in the case of citizenship applications (Šimáčková 2018). It has been described as ‘provisional rejection strategy’ where migrants are seen as ‘bad, until proven otherwise’ (Krecek, qtd. in Artimová 2017); Czech integration policy scored poorly in the education of children and teaching Czech,<sup>20</sup> health insurance coverage, and voting rights; it was inadequately funded and suffered of low funding continuity and long-term planning and coherence. Some argue that the successful integration of migrants has taken place despite the many weaknesses of Czech integration policy (Pořízek 2018). Yet, foreigners assessed the situation in Czechia as better than in their homeland, 60% had not experienced xenophobia (38% did) and 81% trusted Czechs (Vláda České republiky 2016). In a 2019 survey among the Turkish community in Czechia (Tungul 2020), the respondents wished to see an improvement in integration policies, including teaching Czech, adaptation training, better access to health care, less bureaucracy, and English-speaking staff at the immigration related offices.

The attitude of the majority population towards foreigners is more mixed. In 2018, 58% of Czechs saw foreigners as a problem (a fall from 2003 when it reached 73%); 64% believed foreigners increased crime rates, 62% believed foreigners represented a health risk; 46% believed foreigners threatened the Czech way of life and only 20% believed that foreigners helped solve the problems of an ageing society and that they contributed to economic growth. Similarly, only 18% believed they enriched the local culture. People who personally knew foreigners or had foreigners as friends were more likely to say that foreigners were not a problem (CVVM 2018).

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17 Holders of family visa are entitled to work, and the employment is not recorded by the immigration authorities.

18 This number excludes dual citizens.

19 People under international protection and asylum applicants are not required to integrate into the society except for children in the compulsory education age.

20 Integration is easier for foreigners who arrive as students and take mandatory language classes than for those who come for employment or as part of family visa.

## *Muslim Community*

The dominant religion of the two largest migrant groups in Europe, Moroccans and Turks, is Islam. The religious and ethnic diversity of Muslims relates to the perception of Islam as a culture and as an identity (Kastoryano 2016). The European attitudes towards Muslim immigration are often negative across the entire party spectrum but differ in the concerns and their manifestations. Schiffauer (2007) summarised European reservations about Islam as incompatibility with democracy, authoritarian family (patriarchy, misogyny, domestic violence), and fundamentalism. While in many European countries Islam is seen as the religion of the underclass as a result of labour migration which filled low-skilled jobs, the countries of Central Europe tell a different story. Historically, Czechs had a very limited direct experience with Muslims. The first Muslim migrants arrived from Bosnia Herzegovina in the nineteenth century; Islam was institutionalised in 1934 but the registration of Muslim organisations was abolished in 1949. During socialism, most Muslims arrived as students, which was associated with aid and cooperation programmes of the Eastern bloc. Since 1989, the community became more diverse but remains highly fragmented.<sup>21</sup>

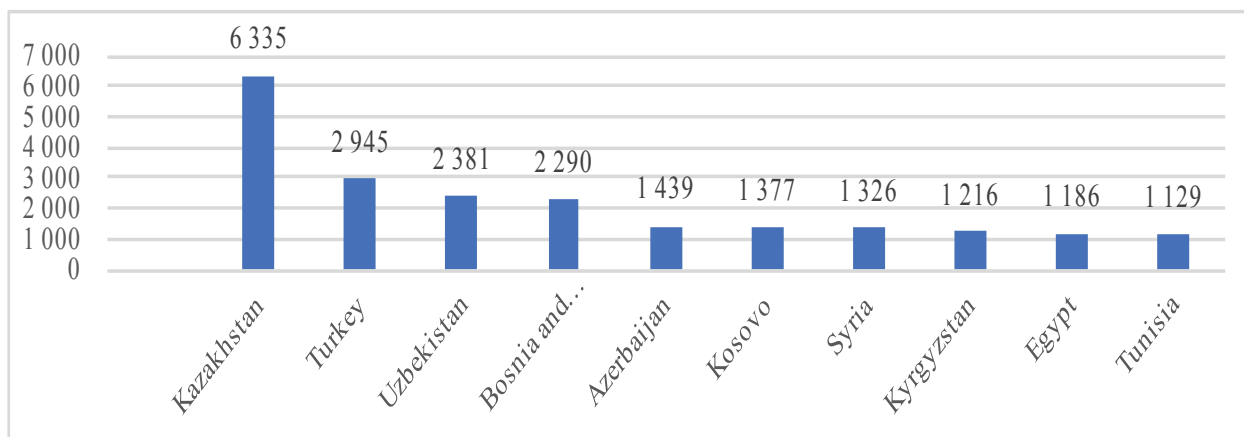
The number of Muslims in Central Europe is much lower than in the West, but we have seen a rise in their numbers.<sup>22</sup> Muslims arrive as economic migrants, students, on family visa, or as asylum seekers. There are currently around 30,000 Muslim migrants living in Czechia, most coming from the Turkic nations (Central Asia, Turkey, Azerbaijan). A Muslim umbrella organisation called the Centre of Muslim Religious Communities was set up in 1991, but the level of their organisation remains low and often follows ethnic lines (Turkish, Afghani) indicating that Islam can play a religious and a cultural role, but can also be a minor factor in defining one's identity.

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<sup>21</sup> For more on the history of Islam in the Czech lands, see, e.g., Topinka (2007).

<sup>22</sup> We focus on migrants (including their children born in Czechia or in mixed families) because the number of Czech converts does not exceed few hundred. Exact numbers are not available.

**Fig. 1: Total Number of Foreigners, by Country (31 March 2020, est. data)**



Source: ČSÚ (2020).

We should distinguish between people who are nominally Muslim and do not practice the religion but practice some of the social aspects of their native faith. A recent survey among Czech Muslims (Čeněk, Kompérová and Smolík 2018) showed that a majority of Muslims in Czechia identified themselves as Muslim but more than half identified stronger with their country than their religion (53.2% versus 46.2%); 78.3% thought that Muslims should be allowed to build mosques in Czechia but 59.5% rarely or never attended the mosque;<sup>23</sup> 54.5% celebrated the holy month of Ramadan; 55% thought headscarves should be allowed in Czech schools, but only 33% believed it was better for Muslim women to wear a headscarf outside of her home. The findings demonstrate that Muslims who move to Czechia are often secular, cultural rather than practicing Muslims,<sup>24</sup> who, however, support the right of Muslims to practice their religion.

Heřmanová and Faryadová (2012) argued that successful integration of Muslims is determined by the migrants' level of education, primary motive for immigration, country of origin, number of Muslims, the size and structure of their community in the country, the media, the length of stay in the country, and the will to integrate including the ability and forms of interaction with the majority population. The latter creates a specific challenge in Central Europe, where societies including Czechia have a very limited direct experience with Muslim migrants but are highly Islamophobic. Many Czechs see Muslims as following a belief whose nature is violent and radical and associate

<sup>23</sup> There are only two mosques in the country (first opened in Brno in 1998, second in Prague) and several prayer rooms.

<sup>24</sup> The last census from 2011 recorded that 3,358 people declared their Muslim faith – that includes Czech converts and ignores those who left the question blank.

them with terrorism.<sup>25</sup> Seen as poor, uneducated, violent, and dangerous, Muslims often evoke fear and hostility. The data though do not support the belief that foreigners (and Muslims especially) represent a security threat (Pořízek 2018).

The Czech public discourse on migration has been controlled by methodological nationalism, which considers the nation-state a natural unit and equates society with it (Cf. Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). The identification of state and nation fails to embrace the specifics of the contemporary Czech society, revealing the increasing differences between centre and periphery, and it is reflected in the polarisation of society and the political scene. What cemented the homogenous society in the past and provided legitimisation for the solidarity necessary for post-1989 reforms fails in the face of increasing heterogeneity, leading to various social conflicts. Immigration is only one of the many aspects of this change, brought by uneven but undeniable economic prosperity. Very politicised, it is a process augmented by the process of Europeanisation, where economic prosperity was not matched by corresponding political and social maturity. The 2015 migration crisis in Europe revealed the deep identity crisis that Czech society has fallen into since 2004, in that it reflected the divergence between Czech and European identities (Artimová 2017), which society and its elites had been unable to reconcile. Islam, a faith traditionally foreign to the Czechs, became one of the targets of rising frustration. It meets the expectations as Muslims are seen as culturally ‘the other’ — 84.2% of Czechs consider the religion partially or fully incompatible with Czech culture (Topinka 2016). The Czech-Muslim community became the subject of discussion without taking an independent position in the discourse; it has been used by various groups to justify and legitimise their positions.

Given the small size of the Muslim community, most Czechs do not have a personal experience with Muslims in the country and base their opinions partially on their experience from abroad, and mostly on information brought to them by the media, especially television (Sedláková and Nohlová 2017; Tkaczyk, Pospěch and Macek 2015), and the internet (Havlíček 2015). Most Czech media are antagonistic towards Muslims, presenting them as either an ‘invisible’ minority in the media or framing them as controversial, conflictual, and foreign elements. The reporting is very stereotyped and does not distinguish between cultural Muslims, practicing Muslims, Muslim radicals, or their

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25 The terrorist attacks in Europe also lead to the fears about the ‘home-grown’ Muslim terrorists and their radicalization — in the Czech case the lawsuit with the former Prague imam indicated that Czechia might have had the first case of radicalised second-generation Muslims. Samer and Omar Shehadeh, who were born in Czechia to a Lebanese mother and Palestinian father and were raised in a secular family seemed well integrated into the Czech mainstream. Samer’s religious interest dates back to early adulthood and his radicalisation started after he studied in Saudi Arabia. He most likely used money collected from Czech Muslims for charity to finance terrorism. Omar went to Syria and joined an-Nusrá. The two brothers are standing trial for supporting terrorism. For more on the case, see ČTK (2020). Another case of radicalisation was related to a lawsuit against the former chair of the Prague Muslim community Vladimír Sáníka, that followed a police raid in a Prague Muslim centres in 2014 and identified a book that is said to spread Salafism. He was charged with crime of establishing, supporting and promoting a movement aimed at suppressing human rights and freedoms (Romea. cz 2017). He was acquitted in May 2018.

countries of origin (Sedláková and Nohlová 2017).<sup>26</sup> Other than the media and the internet, the Czech perception is also affected by imagery of Muslims (often Turks or Arabs) in history books and popular culture, where they are approached with fear or ridicule while portrayed as exotic and mysterious.

The resulting Islamophobia is directly expressed by the extreme right, represented by various (semi-legal) organisations; some of them received a lot of publicity during the migration crisis, such as ‘We Don’t Want Islam in Czechia’. We have witnessed the fragmentation of the extreme right and even the demise of some groups since the end of the migration crisis in 2016, but anti-Muslim rhetoric is still reproduced by the media as described above, and legitimised in the mainstream political arena by some political parties, most visibly Freedom and Direct Democracy (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, SPD) and Trikolóra, and in the statements of individual politicians, including President Miloš Zeman. The tolerance of anti-Muslim rhetoric is strong and the situation escalates in times of elections. The inclusion of anti-Muslims attitudes in mainstream political discourses might have contributed to the weakening of the extreme right organisations, but it has increased overall hostility towards Muslims among some voters.<sup>27</sup>

Czech society does not seem open to multicultural policies (which expect significant tolerance to different cultural and religious lifestyles) and generally favours assimilation — migrants should accept the Czech way of life. Several surveys about Czech Muslims (see, e.g., Čeněk, Komperová and Smolík 2018; Tungul 2020) identified behaviours such as verbal aggression and bullying, and both studies mentioned links between discrimination and their religion. They were most likely to experience discrimination in housing, clubs, bars, cafes, in the public institutions and the police, in finding employment, and in the education sector. Tungul (2020) recorded cases where people experienced discrimination because of their dress, nationality, and names, which implied to the majority population that they were Muslim, even though the person was not practicing the religion or was a self-proclaimed atheist. Some of the respondents mentioned the strategy of changing their names or lying about their nationality to avoid the subsequent hostility; others considered leaving the country. They mentioned the habit of testing their Muslimness by giving them pork or alcohol; some respondents noted that they had Islamophobic friends, who approached them with the attitude that they were ‘different’, ‘not really Muslim’, or ‘became Czech’.

These findings relate to the notion of a ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ Muslim. The host society determines who is a ‘bad’ and who is a ‘good’ Muslim, where the ‘good Muslim’ was even in some liberal circles not

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26 The author’s own experience with reporting about Turkey showed that with minor exceptions, the television stations including Czech Television did not give floor to Muslims or used the respondents to confirm their point of view rather than to report the diversity of Turkish perspectives. That includes reporting about Islamism of the Turkish government, domestic events in Turkey and the opinions of the Turkish community in Czechia regarding these events.

27 In the survey mentioned above (Tungul 2020), the respondents addressed the problem of racism in politics; several respondents noted that racism was used in politics to win elections.

religious, thus, seen as capable of integrating into the host society. Some practicing Muslims reacted to these pressures by highlighting the tolerant and liberal face of Islam — examples are the Prague-based dialogue centre Mozaiky associated with the Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen and individual activists such as Eman Ghaleb, who fought for her right to wear a headscarf at school. However, most Czech Muslims keep their faith very private, with a very low level of public engagement.

## ***Conclusion***

Rather than seeing the small Muslim community in the country, the majority's reaction to the perceived threat might cause disturbances on the political scene with the rise of anti-Muslim, anti-minority, and anti-migration sentiments reflected also in the framing of Muslim immigration in the media. The discourse on migration may or may not reflect real intentions; in either case, it involves a mix of concerns including voters and the business lobby, trade unions and international commitments, which form the real status of the immigration policy as a result of these discursive coalitions. Islam entered the Czech public arena not as a reaction to the Muslim communities, but as a response to new insecurities and the broader discourses about future direction of the country. Czechia is not expected to face significant problems with its Muslim communities in the short and medium-term, as the communities are small and integrated into the economic market. Those who have problems integrating because of the cultural shock caused by the significant cultural differences and the lack of the Muslim community often leave for other countries (affected by the proximity of these countries), where their social needs are better accommodated. The country also does not have a large second-generation community, facing the identity crisis of belonging.

The possibility of having or finding employment, having access to education, and learning the language are very important for successful integration, and together with 'the sense of security and freedom, shared values, discourses of trust, conventional practices, and comfort in living contribute to seeing national communities as objects of emotional identification' (Vainikka 2016: 17). While the Czech immigration policy should increase its demand for economic and civic integration, it should support cultural pluralism, which requires concessions from both the immigrants (they keep those customs and habits that respect the Czech legal system) and from the majority (education to teach tolerance and respect for difference). Given the often very divergent cultural background of Muslim migrants and the insecurities of the majority, the integration strategies should focus on teaching Czech and offering adaptation courses, explaining the importance of immigration, preventing xenophobia, and supporting contacts between Czechs and migrants. These goals coincide with the goals presented also in the Progress report (Vláda České republiky 2019) but the allocated CZK 48,861,261 for 2020 seem quite insufficient to implement the proposed goals.

We should listen to the migrants not only when we need data or advice evaluating the situation ‘on the ground’ or to deliver services, they should also be part of the policy-making processes and involved in the ‘definition, implementation, and monitoring of migration policies’ (Mezetti and Ceschi 2015: 335). We should also be careful about who claims to represent migrants or the diaspora, how representative the voices are, and what legitimacy they have to speak on others’ behalf. If the projections are true and the country will have around 1.5 million foreigners living in the country by 2066, their integration will be a major task. Many of these foreigners will come from countries which have Islam as the majority religion and whose belief system and social values are quite different from the majority Czech population. The country should make its integration policy pro-active and seek integration, especially for those who are not familiar with the majority. This will avoid conflicts and eliminate the efforts to use xenophobia to promote specific political goals.

### ***Recommendations***

- Promote pro-active interaction policy, especially focusing on language instruction and familiarisation with the local cultural and political values, their economic and social rights and duties.
- Support dialogues with the various migrant groups and include their experience in the policy-making process.
- Simplify the immigration law; make better use of the integration instruments provided by the EU programmes and initiatives.
- Promote tolerance in the public sphere, education system, and the media; involve the general public and migrants in public discourses to fight populism and address real risks and threats.
- It is important to acknowledge that the evaluation of the level of integration depends on what the receiving state considers to be successful integration, which obviously presents substantial differences between individual countries. Thus, it is not only the nature of the diaspora but also the receiving state which define the result.



# SMEs As the Centre-Right's Champion of Sustainable Recovery: Central Europe's Rite of Passage

*Eva Palacková*

**Abstract:** The European centre-right has been actively shaping EU climate action for over than a decade. The dawning economic recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic presents a huge challenge for the continent but might be a hidden opportunity. In the central European political landscape, historically lacking in the green agenda, the centre-right parties should embrace the low carbon transition and direct the businesses through the post-corona recovery towards innovative, sustainable and resilient future.

**Keywords:** SMEs, Coronavirus, Green Recovery, Centre-Right

## *Introduction*

The centre-right parties are entering the new decade at decisive crossroads that will determine the future of the European Union's leadership in climate action and its efforts towards a successful clean energy transition during the post-corona recovery. The recent elections in Europe have shown that voters demand sustainable solutions for the challenges of our times. The Covid-19 pandemic has added to the urgent need for a holistic approach to emerge from the crisis, and to achieve resilient growth and jobs.

## *The Centre-Right's Footprint on EU Climate Policy*

The centre-right is founded on values of intergenerational equity and a responsibility towards the future generations, believing in a society where the needs of the present generation should be met without jeopardising the ability for future generations to meet theirs. The centre-right parties support a social market economy as the best suited for responsible and efficient management of resources, which should guide resilient and inclusive growth. Innovation rather than overregulation will drive sustainable development. Cost-efficient, market-driven climate policy has guided the European centre-right's approach to climate action since its onset. The European People's Party (EPP), as the largest and most influential European-level political party from the centre-right, has been actively shaping the dossier. Both previous EU Commissioners for Climate Action, under whom ambitious



successive targets were adopted to cut greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 20% by 2020, and by at least 40% by 2030, came from the EPP. The party was also present at the creation of the EU emission trading system (ETS) and has spearheaded its subsequent reforms along the way. The ETS is the cornerstone of EU's policy to reduce the block's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the most cost-effective manner, while creating a level-playing field for the industry by putting a price on carbon. The two additional funds established under the ETS should further enable the innovation and modernisation of the European economy. The carbon price, when extended to all sectors of the economy, should motivate businesses in their investment decisions as well as allow consumers to make informed choices. Globally, pursuing climate diplomacy and encouraging the implementation of the commitments made under the Paris Agreement is the only option to keep global warming under 2 degrees Celsius.

Addressing the climate emergency amid the recession currently unfolding will be a challenge for world leaders across the political spectrum. The European economy is expected to shrink by 8.3% this year (European Commission 2020c). In the context of the economic crisis, it is important that applied climate measures yield the greatest results at the lowest possible cost. By transforming Europe into a smart, innovative, highly competitive, and resource-efficient low-carbon economy, it should be able to weather the economic downturn, spur sustainable growth, and create resilient, future-proof jobs. A convincing clean transition will need to involve all sectors of the economy, be supported by public and private investment, and foresee both the visible short-term and attractive, feasible long-term goals. For the centre-right, the real measure of the success of such policies will be the viability of small and medium sized businesses (SMEs), which are the engine of Europe's economy. The European economy needs healthy SMEs, and SMEs need a stable and predictable framework to ensure a level playing field. A successful climate policy would recognise the potential of entrepreneurship to be a catalyst for innovation and sustainable development in Europe.

### ***SMEs As the Backbone of the Post-Coronavirus, Low-Carbon Economy***

SMEs and the self-employed were extraordinarily impacted by the consequences of the coronavirus crisis. The remedies which would allow them to get back on their feet must be equally extraordinary. The European Commission's EUR 750 billion recovery package Next Generation EU certainly has just such potential, as it aims for a green, digital transition (European Commission 2020b). Ensuring that the SMEs have access to available funds will be key. Reduced bureaucracy and a low administrative burden should be one of the underlying demands, in particular from the centre-right. The new measures should prevent 'green red-tape' and instead support the reorientation of capital flows into sustainable projects by making lending less bureaucratic and more attractive. The

comprehensive digitalisation of administration would further catalyse the process. The granting of funds has to be simplified, hurdles reduced, and all related procedures fast-tracked. Government banks such the EIB and EBRD should pay particular attention to enabling SMEs to access financing for their green transition (Engström 2020). Counselling and advisory support for SMEs should be expanded. Europe must strengthen itself as an investment destination and promote new investment capital.

Over 900 SMEs and self-employed persons took part in a recent survey by the EPP organisation SME Europe (2020), which identified the following necessary measures to address the consequences of the coronavirus crisis on the European level. Companies demand greater flexibility from the European labour market and improved recognition of qualifications. The European single market must restart along supply chains. Data exchange, artificial intelligence, digital technologies, and modern monitoring methods can help to reopen internal European borders and allow the free movement of passenger and freight traffic again. Protectionism and dangerous narratives about buying only domestic products should be prevented, and instead the EU should coordinate with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to reopen the markets in a way that avoids a global economic collapse.

Next Generation EU should foster massive investments in infrastructure, digital change, education, and research to make Europe engaged in the long term, create growth and jobs, and to create dividends for the future, which could turn the crisis into an opportunity. Government investments in transport, energy, and digital infrastructure are urgently needed and will, in turn, attract new private investment and create added value. Public-private partnerships must be at the centre of a fast and successful digital transformation among medium-sized companies. Centre-right policymakers should continue to champion innovation as the motor of the Green Deal and allow for a flexible and pragmatic approach to achieving ambitious goals amid economic fluctuations. The competitiveness of SMEs faced with global competition is especially important in the absence of similar measures elsewhere in the world, and thus carbon leakage must be avoided.

On the national level, over the short-term SMEs and self-employed persons need quick access to financing in order to survive the first pressure from fixed costs. This can be done through direct support, such as government grants or simplified access to credit by financial institutions. The grants must be relevant and well-designed to bring real results, not just delaying bankruptcies. Tax cuts and deferrals are crucial for boosting the self-corrective powers of the economy and reinvigorating domestic market demand. In the medium-term, more targeted support can provide positive environmental impact. Governments could consider tax incentives for promoting the circular economy, energy efficiency, and low carbon investments. Building green skills for low-carbon transformation by scaling up the education programmes including vocation trainings will further bring the European SME's ahead of the curve.

## *Quo Vadis Central Europe?*

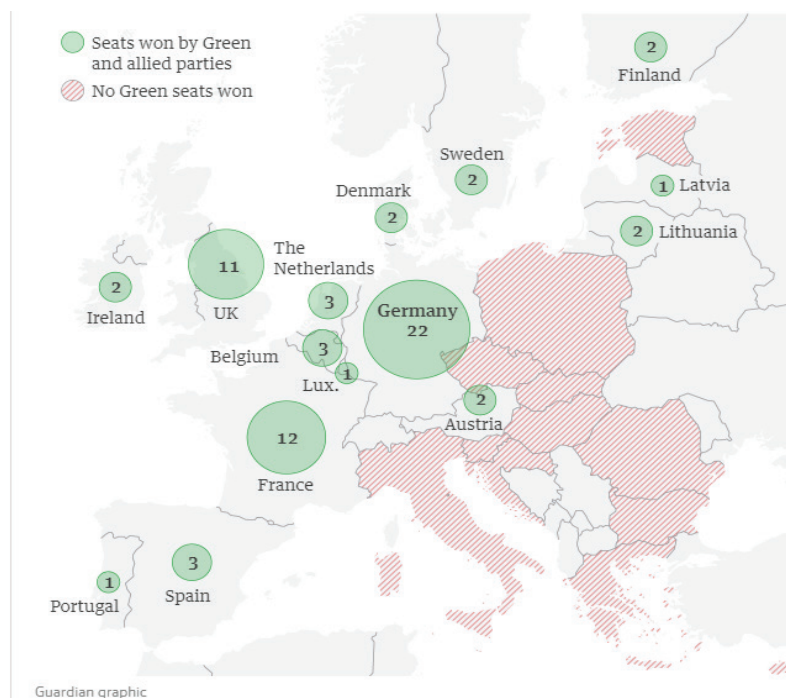
How does the above translate to the Central European narrative and its centre-right parties? Perhaps unintuitively, sustainability policies might prove particularly pertinent for sustaining the parties in the future, as many of them struggle to differentiate themselves among the fragmented centre-right spectrum. Guiding the SMEs through a low-carbon transition could be the long sought-after recipe for success. While in the 2019 European elections the European Greens celebrated a 3% boost to winning nearly 10% of the seats in the European Parliament and becoming the fourth biggest party, the distribution of their votes across the member states is striking (Graham-Harrison 2019). This boost was overwhelmingly carried by a surge in Germany, meanwhile Greens are virtually absent outside of Western Europe.<sup>28</sup> One can ask whether it is a lack of supply, or of demand. Do voters in these regions decline to vote for Green parties because the environmental policies are not a priority, or because there are no parties to represent these interests? The latter appears to be true and could be an opportunity for the centre-right.

Trends demonstrate that there is appetite for environmentally conscious politics among conservative voters, which has already led to some electoral successes. During the European elections, the winning centrist coalition in Slovakia, PS-SPOLU, elected four MEPs, two of which were former environmental activists who had jumped to the front of the ballot thanks to preferential votes. The governing New Democracy (Nea Dimokratia, ND) in Greece has proactively embraced the low-carbon transition (Stamouli 2020), while in Austria (BBC News 2020) and Ireland (Farand 2020), centre-right parties have formed novel coalitions with the Greens and adopted ambitious yet business-friendly government programmes compatible with sustainable economic growth. The pragmatic centre-right approach to climate policy will prove a winning recipe for both economic recovery and the climate.

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<sup>28</sup> The results in the Baltics are misleading as one Lithuanian MEP is independent, and the Latvian party is a leftist Russian minority party, not Green.

**Fig. 1: Seats Won by Green and European Free Alliance Parties in the 2019 EP Election**



Source: Graham-Harrison (2019).

## ***Conclusion***

The Covid-19 crisis will have an unprecedented impact on the European economy, which is predicted to suffer the biggest slump in modern history. The self-employed and SMEs, traditionally the engine of European economy, are at risk to carry the heaviest load, as many do not have the financial cushion to sustain their activities, which were interrupted due to the imposed lockdowns. If implemented correctly, the massive EU recovery fund, with a strong emphasis on sustainability and digitalisation, could not only bolster European businesses but catapult them ahead of the global competition. The Central European centre-right parties should use the green niche in the political market and navigate the SMEs through the low carbon transition. Enabling quick access to financing and the reduction of bureaucratic procedures are crucial prerequisites for its success.

### ***Recommendations***

- Embrace the green post-coronavirus economic recovery as an opportunity to rebuild a resilient, competitive, and sustainable European economy.
- Ensure that SMEs have easy access to available funds.
- Reduce bureaucracy and avoid green red-tape, or additional administrative burden to implementing green measures.
- Improve the availability and dissemination of information and increase advisory support to SMEs.
- Use the centre-right platform to explain to citizens and businesses the long-term benefits of a sustainable transition.

# Myths about the Euro<sup>29</sup>

*Jaromír Hurník, Zdeněk Tůma and David Vávra*

**Abstract:** The preparation for launching the euro, the common European Union currency, initiated momentum for studying the phenomenon of one currency for several countries. The common currency has its defenders and opponents among the general public and experts since the beginning. Twenty years since its introduction, we should have enough empirical evidence to arrive to clear conclusions about the benefits of the Eurozone, but it seems that despite the information collected over the given period, a fundamental question remains: is it a zero-sum game or did the euro really bring positive effects, such as better price stability and higher economic growth? In any case, the current debate requires the knowledge of the basic economic context, which enables us to dispel the remaining myths about the euro. Adopting the euro simultaneously provides us with a unique opportunity to compare the efficiency of inflation targeting with fixing the exchange rate.

**Keywords:** Euro, Eurozone, Inflation, European Union, Exchange Rate, Inflation Targeting

## *Economic Context*

The common currency concept is not a new idea, as monetary unions existed already in the past. The introduction of the euro provided the currency union analyses with a new initiative and many renowned economists joined the debate. Opinions about the potential benefits ranged from deep scepticism, as when Martin Feldstein (1998) saw the introduction of the euro as a threat to Europe's stability; he believed that that the monetary union was just 'one leg', which will not be stable enough without a fiscal and political union. He even believed that it would gradually lead to a conflict among European countries. On the other hand, a large group of economists have believed that euro would contribute to stability and economic growth since the beginning.<sup>30</sup>

The European Commission (1990) prepared an analysis which clearly stated that the single market needed a common currency and claimed that it was a positive sum game. The argument in favour of the benefits was built on several premises. First, companies and households in the eurozone member states would save transaction costs, especially related to currency conversion. The common currency would also contribute to price transparency across the eurozone. Second, the euro would import

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<sup>29</sup> This chapter was supported by GA CR Grant *Anti-Cyclical Policies and External Equilibrium in a Model Inflation Targeting*, no. 18-12340S.

<sup>30</sup> This opinion group is well presented in e.g., Frankel and Rose (2002).

a credible monetary policy to some countries lowering risk premiums, which would immediately be reflected in the debt servicing costs. This premise obviously does not apply to Germany but is clearly relevant in countries like Greece, Portugal, and Spain. The case of Slovakia demonstrated that announcing the plan to adopt the euro lowered Slovak bond yields. Third, fixing the nominal exchange rate is an important argument, as it eliminates unexpected rate fluctuations and possible speculative bubbles, which can ultimately affect the volatility of inflation and output. Experts in this context also often mention that exchange rate stability leads to more intensive foreign trade, which subsequently leads to higher economic growth.

The loss of independent monetary policy is usually considered the main burden of the currency area because it allows, or helps, to absorb local shocks. Moderating these asymmetrical shocks depends on labour market flexibility and the possible reaction of the fiscal policy.<sup>31</sup> Experts usually think of fundamental as following two aspects; the effect on price stability and on economic growth. It is interesting to compare changes in price stability and economic growth before and after adopting the euro. It provides an interesting insight into the effectiveness of the monetary policies, which we will return to below. We can say already at this point that the euro established itself as a credible currency, which is not an insignificant share of foreign currency reserves in the world. The analysis of the European Central Bank's (ECB) monetary policy is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>32</sup>

We will now focus on two often debated aspects; the impact of euro adoption on the volatility of growth and inflation, and the relevance of the exchange rate when adopting the euro. The Czech debate about the euro has been influenced by two prevalent myths for a long time. As mentioned in the introduction, supporters of the euro often mention that its adoption will lead to better economic performance and higher economic growth. We also often see the argument that we should adopt the euro in the future, but that we should wait for a better exchange rate so that we do not become poorer using the current rate. Both premises are false. The euro itself will not increase or reduce economic growth — in this respect its effect is neutral. Regarding the exchange rate for euro adoption, it does not have an effect on our total wealth, nor is the effect totally unequivocal.

### ***Effect on Growth and Neutrality of Money***

Given that all more advanced countries today think it is necessary that capital and related investments move freely between individual economies, the central banks must choose between two options: (i) independent (autonomous) monetary policy with a floating exchange rate, or (ii) monetary

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31 A good number of studies discussed this aspect, see, e.g., Feldstein (1998); Bayoumi and Eichengreen (1992).

32 A good source are ECB annual conferences which present the observations of academics and central bankers; see, e.g., Mongelli and Wyplosz (2008).

policy imported from abroad through a fixed rate. A wide range of choices and shades exists between these two options, based on how much the central bank decides to fix the rate. The fixed exchange rate actually causes an ‘import’ of monetary policy from abroad, but in the case of floating exchange rate the central bank chooses a different target, which is most often inflation in the last 20-30 years.

We have witnessed tendencies to support one of these two extreme positions in the last decades. Parallel with many countries adopting independent monetary policies and inflation targeting, we see the rise of monetary union projects wherein a group of countries decide to apply common monetary policy. It is, therefore, a type of a fixed exchange rate, whose main benefit is higher credibility in the financial markets. Such a monetary union is, thus, more difficult to dissolve than to simply abandon the normal fixed exchange rate regime. Another advantage has more political than economic context; to create a common currency can be more acceptable than surrendering to the monetary policy of the strongest economy in the area. It is more acceptable for the European countries (other than Germany) to use euro than the German mark.

What could be the motives for initiating the ‘euro project’, or for other countries to have joined it later? One key motive could be the aforementioned dominance of one economy (in the European case, Germany), which would determine monetary policies of the other countries anyway. This motivation is even stronger in countries which are not very big, economically closely tied to German economy and other key member states of the eurozone, and do not have a history of their own monetary policy. That applies to the Baltic countries, for instance. For some countries, especially at Europe’s periphery, political and security motives might be important. The view from these countries (again applying to the Baltics) might follow the logic that ‘the more integration, the safer we feel’.

We should also remember what the common monetary policy cannot offer. Public debates sometimes bring up the argument that a common monetary policy can increase national economic growth and, as mentioned above, some experts have argued the same. Some economists believe that the euro can deepen economic cooperation and that it could contribute to growth on both sides. It is true that a correlation between the volume of foreign trade and growth exists, but the evidence that more trade leads to growth or vice versa is disputable. A central banker considers the argument about higher economic growth truly misguided or even misleading. As said above, the common currency area, and thus also the euro, is only a specific type of fixed exchange rate. The choice of the regime does not in itself lead to lower or higher economic growth — if it did, all would naturally opt for the better option. This concept is known in monetary economics as ‘money neutrality’, meaning that the choice of the exchange rate regime does not change the long-term trend or performance of the economy.



Let's also recall the role of the monetary policy. Despite all the tools of the central banks, which are many, monetary policy cannot change the parameters of an economy which are crucial to its long-term performance. Those include especially labour market flexibility, productivity growth, performance of the institutions, how easy it is to conduct business, etc. Monetary policy has an anticyclical role and tries to at least partially level out the course of the business cycle, or cushion its extreme fluctuations. In other words, monetary policy affects the fluctuations of various economic variables, but not their trends. Thus, if we fix the exchange rate, it will be inclined towards greater inflation fluctuation and vice versa. The choice of the exchange rate regime then also affects the adaptation of the real variables, such as gross national product and volatility. Examples are not hard to find; if we examine the performance of the European economies since the eurozone was established, including the period of the recent financial crisis, we cannot find any clear evidence proving that, growth-wise, it was more advantageous to be in than out. The long-term performance of the economy really depends on factors other than the chosen fixed exchange rate regime in any of its forms, including monetary unions.

It is very illustrative for Czechia to compare its situation with Slovakia, because the two economies are structurally similar and to a large extent interconnected. Looking at the volatility of key variables, inflation and output,<sup>33</sup> we see that the volatilities decreased in both countries, which was obviously caused by common factors. We cannot see a significant difference in development, and we can assume that both monetary policy regimes, *i.e.*, inflation targeting in Czechia and fixing the Slovak crown exchange rate to the euro, have comparable functional characteristics. It would be interesting if we could identify an asymmetrical shock and then observe the reaction within their given monetary political regimes.<sup>34</sup>

**Fig. 1: Standard Deviations of Basic Macroeconomic Indicators in Czechia and Slovakia Before and after Slovakia Adopted the Euro in 2009**

Inflation			Consumption		GDP		Unemployment	
	qq(1996,2): qq(2008,4)	qq(2009,1): qq(2019,4)	qq(1996,2): qq(2008,4)	qq(2009,1): qq(2019,4)	qq(1996,2): qq(2008,4)	qq(2009,1): qq(2019,4)	qq(1996,2): qq(2008,4)	qq(2009,1): qq(2019,4)
CR	4.1	1.5	4.4	2.3	3.8	3.9	6.9	5.2
SK	5.1	2.0	7.8	3.2	8.6	5.0	15.4	11.2

Source: own calculations.

33 We count the volatilities as standard deviations, economic output comprises of consumption and GDP.

34 We analysed this scenario in Hurník, Tůma and Vávra (2010).

## ***Is Exchange Rate Important for Adopting the Euro?***

Another myth we would like to address concerns the exchange rate upon adopting the euro. Arguments appeared that a lower exchange rate would make the Czech wages and pensions converted into euros too low and that Czechs would become poorer, the value of their savings would decline, etc. This argument is misleading, to say the least, and if the architects of economic policy thought this way, it could lead to bad decisions. We need to distinguish between two key aspects: impact on the value of wages/prices and impact on the value of savings/debts (in economic jargon, it is the difference between flow and stock variables). In any case, we cannot isolate one variable and use it to draw general conclusions. For instance, it does not make sense to claim that a salary of CZK 27,000 would become EUR 1,000 with an exchange rate of 27 CZK/EUR and EUR 1,350 with an exchange rate of 20 CZK/EUR, therefore, we would be better off with a higher exchange rate because we would get more euros for our work. The price of labour would naturally reflect in the prices of goods and services, and we would not be better off with a stronger CZK in the end, not to mention the resulting lower competitiveness.

The example above is a simplification, and in real life it would lead to redistributive effects inside the economy. With a higher rate, a holiday abroad could cost less, but importers would have lower revenues and profit. All in all, we should be neither better nor worse off, regardless of the exchange rate. Too high an exchange rate would undermine competitiveness of the Czech export-oriented economy, which would push wages down. Therefore, we cannot assess the aggregate impact on the economy based on one isolated variable. When the exchange rate changes, in principle it means that only nominal values change and it does not lead to a real change in wealth in the long-run. The value of accumulated wealth, or our savings, requires a somewhat more complicated consideration. If I saved one million crowns, the higher or lower exchange rate used for its conversion makes a clear difference visible at first sight. Our deposits in banks (the sum of households and non-financial businesses, data from the end of 2019) amount to almost CZK 5,000 billion. If we compare a conversion from CZK to EUR at for example 27 and 20 CZK/EUR, we will receive approximately one fourth the difference in the value of our euro savings, which is obviously a lot.

The ‘opposite’ of our savings are our debts; their highest share are bank loans, which amounted to almost CZK 3,600 billion at the end of 2019. We would have to convert them as well and conversion with a higher exchange rate would increase the value of the debt in euros. We should not ignore state debt, which amounted to over CZK 1,600 billion at the end of 2019 (and is rising rapidly due to the Covid-19 crisis). It might seem that it is not the debt of households and businesses, but the state which does not have any other means other than money collected from taxes, so state debt affects taxpayers as well. The sum of our debts is higher than our deposits in banks. What applies here, too, is that

inside the economy a lower or higher exchange rate when adopting the euro would have redistributive effects: lenders, for instance households, would benefit from higher exchange while debtors such as companies and the state would benefit from the opposite. Similarly, a higher exchange rate would benefit the importers and would harm the exporters.

Using some demagoguery, we could say that if Czechia adopted the euro ‘tomorrow’, the lower exchange rate would be more beneficial, because it would lower our debts expressed in euros and this reduction would be higher than the ‘loss’ caused by lower deposits. Let’s use this example, however, to only illustrate the situation. We only considered bank deposits, but other types of savings exist, such as pension funds and capital life insurance, while loans are also provided by non-bank financial institutions, which we did not take into account.<sup>35</sup> It is, therefore, obvious that we cannot take one variable such as savings and declare it a determining factor for assessing the impact on our wealth. The currency exchange rate is just a nominal value and its movement changes neither the performance, nor the wealth of the economy in the long run. From the point of the entire economy, it does not matter at all, what exchange rate we have and with what exchange rate we enter the eurozone. The exchange rate is a nominal value and its change causes only changes in other nominal values. It can help us compare our economy with other economies at any given moment but does not create wealth. Investors care far more about the rates of return on their investment in percentages than the currency of their accounting books. How rich we are is determined solely by what we can produce and create, not by the currency we count it in.

## ***Conclusion***

Despite more than twenty years of the common European currency’s existence, some elementary questions raised more than two decades ago remain open. We can still meet with the argument that euro benefits the economy and increases economic growth, even though empirically and theoretically we can hardly find any support for such a claim. We tried to explain why we cannot expect from changing the monetary-political regime more than what monetary policy can actually deliver. We demonstrated the confusion in debates about the exchange rate when adopting the euro. We support the opinion that, when considering all the variables in the economy, the level of the exchange rate does not play a significant role. However, we acknowledge that this area would require a more detailed examination and it is surprising that no such study has been published yet, for instance, prepared by the central bank. In any case, it is obvious that euro has rather successfully survived two big economic shocks, and that it will be subjected to many more academic analyses.

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<sup>35</sup> We could examine the net investment position of Czechia, which is not adjusted to inflation, so it would not be an ‘easy exercise’.

# Conclusion

*Lucie Tungul*

Our resources are limited and in order to maximise their effective use, we have a need for their efficient distribution, which would fairly address social differences, bolster advantages and limit disadvantages. Fair distribution of resources makes society stronger, the values of which are based on rule of law, respect for human rights, solidarity and tolerance. These very values provide opportunities to prepare the future generations for responsibility, independence, and cooperation and allow them to fully utilise their potential. They are also the core values, which make Europe and Czechia a place, whose high quality of life attracts and inspires other parts of the world. Quality of life cannot be measured by GDP only, it is a combination of a number of complex factors such as the quality of the environment, the availability and quality of health care, material conditions (the quality and availability of jobs, housing and education), the quality and access to services and interhuman relations, including civic society. The Covid-19 crisis has revealed a number of weaknesses in many of these areas, but it has also demonstrated that people are able to rapidly respond to challenges and quickly adapt to new situations. Preparedness and flexibility are not, however, evenly spread across the population and if we do not eliminate those obstacles, which prevent many people from embracing change, it might jeopardise their participation in these processes. Differences will increase between regions, classes and generations, leading to a fragmented and unstable society.

The chapters in this publication have addressed selected topics faced by current Czech and European societies, whether it relates to various developments in foreign policy (often in conflict with expected economic interests), to the stability and development of the democratisation process in the EU neighbourhood (and this not only concerning media freedom), or to challenges which lead to significant changes in the party systems and interfere with the long established political processes. The Covid-19 crisis has fully exposed the weaknesses of the healthcare systems and fundamentally threatened the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises, the backbones of the European and Czech economies. Although Covid-19 has been the most vocal topic of 2020, it has not changed the seriousness of other issues such as migration and integration of migrants, disinformation, climate change and other environmental threats. The crisis has also provided an opportunity to introduce radical reforms accompanying the ongoing paradigm change, which affects how we perceive and understand the world around us. Although the crisis can be used to introduce positive changes, we should not forget that we are also facing the danger that certain forces will try to take advantage of the situation, which might lead to increasing inequality and conflict in society in some Hobbesian vision involving fierce competition and enmity.

Those countries which currently seem to be doing best during the crisis are defined by a political leadership, which relies on cooperation and the ability to form coalitions across diverging views and approaches, building solid communication with all the partners including the opposition and the general public, and linking decisions to expertise. The key factor combining all these factors is transparency, the only guarantee of a certain stability in these volatile times. Removing former barriers and avoiding the erection of new ones, together with a responsible approach to the entire society (not only the prospective voters), should be the goal of all democratic forces in a society interested in providing a good quality of life in all its aspects, *i.e.*, not only material guarantees, but also individual freedoms. This publication aims to contribute to an expert discussion, which does not assume the existence of one universal truth, but which contributes to a dialogue based on facts and data, respect and the acknowledgement of the limits of human knowledge.

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