

Parliamentary Elections in Czech Republic and Czech Foreign Policy

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It can be argued that since the Czech accession to the EU there has been little or no attempt to formulate long-term foreign policy strategy based on a broad agreement among key political parties. Therefore, a guarantor of the continuity in Czech foreign policy has to a large extent been the state bureaucracy, more precisely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is no wonder then that this continuity has been limited only to a few key foreign policy priorities (the transatlantic link, human rights, energy security and diversification of energy sources, Eastern Europe and further EU enlargement).

Prime Minister Petr Nečas has stated that he wants to make Czech foreign policy more predictable and coherent. One can expect the new government will increase its profile in international policy in general and the EU in particular, where the Czech Republic will have to restore its damaged credibility as a result of the botched Czech EU Presidency.

At this point, it seems that with almost a three-fifth majority in the parliament (118 from 200 MPs), the government might not feel compelled enough to strike a broad deal with the opposition on foreign policy. However, after the senatorial election in October, coalition parties lost majority in the Senate which could make more difficult to push forward government foreign policy agenda in the Senate's Foreign Committee and in the Upper Chamber as such (e. g. Senate's approval is needed for deployment of the troops abroad). For such strategic issues the government and opposition will have difficult time finding some common ground.

As the new government will move to draft a new foreign policy concept, the document is likely to prioritize energy security, engagement in Eastern Europe (based on the EU's Eastern Partnership and bilateral transformation assistance programs) and its commitment to the transatlantic link.

Foreign Policy in Party Platforms of the Coalition Members

The Civic Democratic Party (ODS) has unveiled a foreign policy manifesto based on the promotion of a strong transatlantic link and the pursuit of pragmatic foreign policy driven by economic interests. A shift in ODS's EU policy after the departure of Vaclav Klaus, the party's founder and long-time chairman, has led to the softening of ideological opposition to the Union, while recognizing the country's EU membership as an irreversible political reality. The post-Klaus ODS acknowledges that the country has benefited from its accession to the single market as well as financial subsidies from the EU budget. The 2010 party platform stipulates that foreign policy should be utilized to increase country's security, prosperity and freedom. In this regard, the ODS emphasizes the need to continue liberalization of international trade, rejects protectionism and regulations in the EU, and strives to enhance economic diplomacy. The ODS considers our alliance with Washington as a cornerstone of our security policy, while it calls for more burden sharing between Europe and the US. The ODS supports EU enlargement as a means of spreading freedom, stability and free trade. As far as Russia is concerned, the ODS campaign platform mentions the war in Georgia and our country's energy dependency on Moscow as negative instances of Russia's rising influence in Europe, which needs be contained.

The TOP 09 party has presented a foreign policy manifesto based on the personal authority of its chairman Karel Schwarzenberg and his foreign policy priorities when he firstly served as a foreign ministry in 2007-2009. The party platform takes into account broad economic and security interests of the Czech Republic, while stressing the need to meet our obligations of membership in NATO and the EU. In addition, TOP 09 calls for promotion of democracy and human rights in the world. TOP 09 is in favor of continued enlargement of both NATO and the EU, especially with an aim to bring in the Western Balkan countries. The party supports the current decision making mechanisms as established by the Lisbon Treaty. Addressing energy security, the party platform calls for greater diversification of energy suppliers and transit routes. Another way of enhancing our energy security, according to TOP 09, is through developing a common European energy policy, the party wants to promote. Finally, TOP 09 would like to involve the parliamentary opposition in formulating a long-term foreign policy concept.

The Veci Verejne (VV) party emphasizes the need to pursue foreign policy based on equality, dialogue and cooperation. The party strives to implement its foreign policy manifesto not only within the framework of the EU but also through maintaining an active and loyal alliance with the US and other NATO members while deepening friendly ties with our neighbors. The VV defines itself as a pro-European party, who seeks to actively participate in resolving problems within the framework of the Union. The party demands that new member states should be granted equal statues with the old ones, especially in the area of agriculture, liberalization of the internal market and easier access to EU

funds. According to the VV, our energy security should be best attained through forging a greater unity among EU member states in their dealings with key suppliers (e.g. Russia) as well as improving energy infrastructure. In order to set a date for the adoption of the single European currency, the VV proposes to conduct a thorough expert analysis first to ensure an easy transition. The party explicitly opposes Turkish membership in the Union. The VV is a proponent of the creation of independent European armed forces. In order to meet obligations under our NATO membership, the party is determined to increase our troops deployments abroad even at the cost of reducing defense spending at the time of the economic crisis. The VV also declares its commitment to universal human rights.

Having compared the party platforms of the three pcoalition members, this study has not identified any major disagreement in their foreign policy outlooks. Differences do exist, however, but they manifest themselves mostly either in the degree of emphasis the parties put on certain issues or their disparate foreign policy priorities, especially concerning the process of European integration. Although some of the foreign policy goals championed by the VV (e.g. campaigning against Turkish membership in the EU, creating an independent European army) are not in sync with the other two political parties. Nevertheless, those issues will hardly pose any serious political risk for the government since they will be either brushed aside (e.g. accession talks with Turkey) or not disused at all (e.g. European Army).

European Union

The coalition government seems to be as much pro-EU as the former Topolánek's government was. Prime Minister Nečas is known as a conservative politician with a reluctant approach towards the interference of the EU policies into the social and political spheres. He does not share most of Václav Klaus's extreme positions towards the EU, however, Nečas does not want to oppose him for two principal reasons. First, they do have some common ideological grounds for critique of the EU; second, he needs to reconcile pro-European and anti-European wings of the ODS after the Lisbon Treaty schism. Although Nečas pragmatically supported the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, he does not wish any further European integration beyond the Lisbon.

In connection with the Czech EU Presidency, then-PM Topolánek's cabinet transferred the EU agenda to the Office of the Government, which set up a new department under the authority of then-EU Affairs Minister Alexandr Vondra. The European Policies Coordination Department was the Ministry's central unit aimed at assisting the minister in his role as an inter-ministerial junction of the EU agenda implementation, which no longer comes under the definition of the foreign policy. In the current cabinet, the post of the EU Affairs Minister was not established and the EU agenda has turned disputable in talks between the ODS and the TOP 09, which took the office of the Foreign Minister. PM Nečas appointed Michal Sedláček, head of the European Policies Coordination Department, as his

deputy and demanded he was granted nearly ministerial powers – such as participation at the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) – thus curbing powers of the Foreign Ministry. The coalition partner TOP 09 rejected it striving not to deprive the Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg of significant authorities. The dispute has ended in a draw as the European policies coordination remains under the responsibilities of the Office of the Government; however, the Foreign Minister continues representing the Czech Republic at the GAC. It remains uncertain, what impacts will these unresolved arrangements have on the situation if a specific disagreement on the Czech Republic's stance to the EU agenda emerges, in which PM's and Foreign Ministers' points of views would differ.

The two other governmental parties manifest more pro-EU stances in their platforms, however especially from the VV one can not expect an ambitious foreign policy agenda. The Czech EU policy will mostly focus on economic issues, such as dealing with the impacts of the global economic crisis, market regulations, and reforming the EU budget. Although the government could try to raise its profile in the economic sphere, its room for maneuver is rather limited since the Czech Republic remains outside of the Eurozone. The government will most certainly push hard to meet the Maastricht criteria but less out of concern for the early adoption of euro rather than speedy recovery of the Czech public finances. The Czech Republic will not see the introduction of euro under the watch of current coalition.

In addition, the government will support further EU enlargement into the Western Balkans (the coalition members will most likely disagree over Turkey as a candidate country). The Czech Republic will also continue to promote the Eastern Partnership during the Hungarian and Polish EU Presidencies in 2011. Increasing significance of the EU energy security policies will remain an invariable element of the Czech foreign policy also in the context of the upcoming EU Presidencies. The Czech government will keep supporting projects that contribute to the diversification of transit lines for energy supplies (e.g. Nabucco), which improve mutual interconnection of energy grids and extend capacity for raw materials storage (primarily gas and oil).

Transatlantic Relations

The emphasis on strong Transatlantic relations and a close security-political alliance with the US are one of the unifying factors within the ruling coalition. The ODS has won the post of the Defence Minister for its Deputy Chair Alexandr Vondra, who is known as the most salient defender of the Transatlantic alliance. In the case of the TOP 09, whose constituents are highly pro-European and rather liberal, long-term stances of the party's Head Karel Schwarzenberg, which make the party give preference to the US security guarantees to the detriment of the European warrants, are the crucial signposts. VV's politicians have up to now been engaged in the domestic political agenda; the

transatlantic orientation – however, not an unconditional one – can only be read in the VV's party platform.

As to the NATO, the government will continue developing its Czech ally's commitments in the foreign military missions, mainly in Afghanistan. In line with the Alliance plan to decrease the number of soldiers in Kosovo, the Czech Republic is gradually reducing its local contingent and all Czech troops are to leave the country in the second half of 2011. Under the formulation of a NATO's new strategic concept, it is expected that the Czech Republic will promote measures leading to an increased capacity of action of the Alliance and to the maintenance of a strong US engagement within the NATO.

Finally, the Czech Republic will seek as much participation as possible in the revised plans to deploy American missile defenses in Europe. Considering that some candidates for the cabinet posts in the new government were personally involved in the missile defense talks with the Bush administration, it can be inferred that the new government will probably ask for some of the components of the new anti-missile shield to be based in the Czech Republic.

Russia

A cautious attitude towards Russia and its foreign policy is also another common feature of the coalition parties' foreign policies. This attitude is seen mainly in the area of energy security, democratisation in the post-Soviet region, business relations and human rights promotion. Russia is not considered to be PM Nečas' government's foreign political priority, however, it is a significant element incorporated in other priorities. The Czech Republic seems to be unprepared to formulate its own positive policy towards this country and in the coming years, it will continue acting rather in reaction to Russia's activities. On the other hand, Moscow itself will probably show less interest in the Czech Republic than was the case during the Czech EU Presidency in 2009 or at the time of intensive talks about the deployment of American radar base in the Central Europe.

New Czech Ambassador to Russia Petr Kolář (Czech Ambassador to the US until 2010), who was nominated by the cabinet and approved by the president, may be perceived as a token of a new and intelligible policy towards Russia, including drawing attention to the insufficient human rights and civil liberties protection. It is likely that in the case of the Russian Federation, doubts about the compatibility between the critique of the domestic affairs and the promotion of the trade relations, will prove unfounded, as seen previously in many other countries (Belarus, China).

As a dominant energy exporter for the Central Europe Russia will be at the forefront of Prague's effort to diversify suppliers of gas, oil and nuclear fuel. Russian geopolitical interests will be taken into

account in decision about supplier of technology for two new nuclear reactors in Temelín power plant (there are still three rival companies in game: French Areva, Russian Atomstroieexport and American Westinghouse).

Negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and the Russian Federation may become an occasion for an open declaration of the Czech position towards Russia. Herein, the Czech Republic (together with other countries) can insist on reference to the human rights and democratic standards issues and to call on Moscow to commit itself in these respects.

Human Rights and Transformation Assistance

Promotion of democracy and human rights, a trademark of Czech diplomacy, has been losing steam since the fall of the Topolánek's government due to budget cuts and change in foreign policy priorities. It can be expected that current government will keep transformation assistance as one of its foreign policy priorities while making it an integral tool of Czech diplomacy. The government will maintain mutually beneficial channels of communications between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-governmental sector up and running since such a partnership between the government and NGOs is instrumental in making transformation assistance programs more effective and tailored to needs of recipient countries.

The selection of ten priority countries for government's transformation assistance will probably remain the same, while Prague will prioritize countries, whose political and economic stability is of crucial interest to the Czech Republic (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia) at the expense of distanced dictatorships (e.g. Cuba, Myanmar).

The funds available for Czech development aid programs have been shrinking due to budget cuts. In contrast to human rights, it can be argued that the government will not consider it as a priority and the funds will be reduced. Dwindling development aid might also reduce the Czech Republic's participation in international cooperation, for instance, as part of the EU. It can be expected, therefore, that the Ministry of Industry and Trade under Mr Kocourek will push towards using the development aid to pursue particular economic interests of Czech exporters.

Economic Diplomacy

The issue of the economic diplomacy has become one of central themes of the Czech cabinet's foreign policy discussions first shortly after the elections. The Ministry of Industry and Trade (led by Martin Kocourek from the ODS) pointed to an unresolved poor distribution of competences in the long run between the Trade Ministry and the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs (led by Karel Schwarzenberg from

the TOP 09) in the area of support for Czech entrepreneurs abroad. Minister Kocourek intends to change the current state of affairs when the Czech embassies' commercial counsellors are practically subordinate to the Foreign Ministry, however, nominations of counsellors and their performance supervision is in the competence of the Industry and Trade Ministry.

The cabinet seeks to enforce agenda harmonisation in the area of export support in co-operation with other foreign representatives of the CzechInvest (support for FDI to the Czech Republic) and CzechTrade (support for export) agencies. Extending engagements of individual exporters and higher involvement of private sources in the Czech economic diplomacy (e.g. per example of the Finnish Finpro company) should become important features of the system change. However, it is unlikely that the current coalition government will succeed in implementing the full scale harmonisation, though the planned austerity measures should result in rationalization of expenses for foreign representations of organisations pursuing similar activities.

Who is who

The post on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Karel Schwarzenberg, the leader of TOP 09, had been sure even before the talks about the new government started. This is was only due to the fact that he served as a foreign minister during our EU Presidency, but also that other parties do not have a personality of Schwarzenberg's stature, perhaps with a sole exception of Alexandr Vondra. The latter became finally defense minister. As the biggest party in the coalition the ODS seeked to gain some of the power ministries and the ministry of defense for the party's vice-chairman Vondra seemed as a logical choice.

In the person of PM Nečas, President Václav Klaus has gained a partially allied political personality with similar opinions, who will refrain from weakening the president's authority in the foreign policy agenda, unlike the former PM Topolánek did. It is expected that the president will not slacken in his effort to comment on the global problems and the Czech foreign policy, and in particular that he will not tone down his penetrative statements in relation to the EU and its policies. However, a potential clash with the pragmatic cabinet politics can be anticipated only in negotiations on the European financial prospects for 2014 – 2020, primarily if the Czech Republic comes nearer to the position of an EU net remitter.

Former first Deputy Head of the ODS David Vodrážka was surprisingly nominated and elected to the chairman post of the Chamber of Deputies' Committee on Foreign Affairs. Vodrážka wanted to open the debate on the economic diplomacy in the Parliament and sought to reach a compromise between the Industry and Trade Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through his committee. Jan Bauer,

also from the ODS, became the chairman of the Chamber of Deputies' Committee on European Affairs.

As the ČSSD gained a majority of seats in the Upper Chamber of the Parliament in the November senate elections, Senator Jiří Dienstbier - former Czechoslovak Foreign Minister - who was elected as a Social Democrat's candidate, will remain in his post as the chair of the Senate's Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security. By comparison with the last tenure, Dienstbier's position will strengthen as the Senate will be able to obstruct proposals coming from the government more effectively, in particular regarding sending military troops abroad, for which Senate's approval is essential.

Conclusions

The current governmental Policy Statement has been formed on the basis of overlaps between party platforms of the ODS, TOP 09, and VV. The elementary continuity of the Czech foreign policy with its roots in the 2003 Concept of Foreign Policy is likely to be preserved.

While the ODS has a consistent, well-developed foreign policy platform, and TOP 09 has Karel Schwarzenberg, the question remains what impact will the newcomer VV have on Czech foreign policy. Although its foreign policy platform in many respects correlates with the foreign policy thinking of the other two parties, the VV still lacks a credible personality, who could convincingly sell party's foreign policy agenda. Potential conflicts may arise over particular aspects of the Czech EU policy, which will be handled by individual ministries rather than the MFA or the Ministry for European Affairs, as was the case until quite recently.

PM Nečas's cabinet titled itself "the Cabinet of Budget Responsibility". It considers the consolidation of public finances and reforms of the state social policies as its main tasks, while foreign political and EU agendas are somewhat set aside – even in the eye of the constituents. On one hand, this creates an opportunity for preserving the continuity in the foreign policy; however, on the other hand, recent cuts in expenses have also impacted the Czech diplomacy in the form of dissolution of the Czech embassies (Democratic Republic Congo, Venezuela, Kenya, Yemen and Costa Rica) and dismissal of several hundreds of employees. Thus the following principle valid for other government policies is also applicable to the Czech foreign policy: cuts in expenses need not necessarily lead to higher efficiency unless they are combined with building new quality governance. Therefore a new foreign policy conception, which the cabinet committed itself to elaborate, can be hoped to deliver this new quality.

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