

Czech Foreign Policy and EU Membership: Europeanization and Domestic Sources

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of EU integration and membership on the foreign policy of the Czech Republic. After examining the historical, geopolitical, and domestic sources of Czech foreign policy, it surveys Czech foreign policy since 1989, focusing on five distinct periods. The paper concludes that Czech foreign policy has been “Europeanized” to only a limited extent, and that EU influence on Czech foreign policy decision-making is relatively small compared to domestic political factors. EU membership also does not appear to have altered basic perceptions of Czech foreign policy interests, which remain largely determined by (pre-1989) historical experience and perceptions of geopolitical vulnerability. However, the Czech Republic has also sought to use the EU to achieve its key foreign policy goals, especially during its EU presidency in the first half of 2009. Limited socialization within EU institutions and the Czech Republic’s peculiar historical experience and geopolitical situation are the main explanations for limited Europeanization, suggesting that further socialization and the accumulated experience of EU membership could promote greater Europeanization of Czech foreign policy over time.

INTRODUCTION

Among students of European politics there is a general consensus that membership in the European Union (EU) changes things in the countries that join it. What exactly changes, to what extent, and how or why these changes happen are all questions that are the subject of considerable debate within the broad field of “Europeanization” studies, along with the question of why some countries, policies, and institutions change more than others. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that EU membership does have consequences for domestic politics, policies, and politics.

To date, most Europeanization research has focused on the EU’s impact on domestic political institutions (executives, parliaments, courts, territorial politics) and politics (party systems, NGOs and interest groups, political culture). It has also focused heavily on the “communitized” policies of the EU’s first pillar – the policy areas in which decision-making proceeds according to the supranational “Community method” and in which the EU exerts the greatest influence (Major 2005). However, while it has received much less attention, Europeanization studies have also examined the EU effect in intergovernmental policy areas, especially foreign and security policy. These studies have generally concluded that EU membership also seems to affect the foreign policies and foreign policy behavior of member states. At a minimum, participation in the mechanisms of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) affects the institutional procedures by which by which governments make foreign policy decisions (M.E. Smith 2000). Some have also argued that EU membership leads to the development of a “European reflex” (*reflexe communautaire*) – the predisposition to coordinate with other EU countries when it comes to foreign policy decisions (Tonra 2001). Going even further, others have argued that EU membership alters the substance of national foreign policies, leading to the increased convergence of national foreign policies and the emergence of shared European norms, interests, and identities that are replacing traditional national ones (Wong 2007, 325). Because of the intergovernmental nature of EU foreign policy, the main mechanism of Europeanization identified in the literature is the process of “socialization” – resulting from the increased interaction of national foreign ministries within the EU context and the gradual internalization by national officials of EU norms and expectations – rather than forced, formal adaptation to EU rules and requirements (Wong 2007: 333; Tonra 2000: 229; White 2001: 6; Major 2005: 185-6).

The Europeanization literature also concludes that the impact of EU membership on foreign policy is greater for small member states than for large ones. As Tonra (2001) argues, this is because EU membership expands the foreign policy agendas and the range and depth of the foreign policies of small states; it thus enhances the influence of small states, and gives them access to decision making on issues they otherwise would have no say on. Nevertheless, as Larsen (2005) found in his study of Danish foreign policy, despite their small size and limited resources, even small member states retain separate foreign policy identities and interests within the EU context, with the relative influence of the EU (versus domestic or international factors) and the separateness of national foreign policies varying according to the issue area and the fit between EU policy and national interests and activities.

This paper examines the impact of EU membership on the foreign policy of the Czech Republic, a relatively small (or medium-sized) member state that joined the EU in 2004, after more than four decades of communist rule and inclusion in the Soviet sphere as part of Czechoslovakia. From the perspective of Europeanization, it seeks to answer several key questions: 1) How has EU integration and membership changed or altered Czech foreign policy? 2) What is the relative influence of the EU on Czech foreign policy compared to domestic (or international) factors? 3) To what extent is Czech foreign policy made through the EU, as opposed to without or outside of EU? 4) To what extent has EU influence on Czech foreign policy been affected (limited or enhanced) by the Czech Republic's experience as a newly-independent state that has only recently regained its sovereignty in this crucial policy area? And finally, 5) How has the Czech Republic sought to influence EU foreign policy since it has become a member state, particularly during its EU presidency in the first half of 2009?

To answer these questions, the paper proceeds in chronological fashion, investigating Czech foreign policy as it has developed in five main periods: the initial years after the Velvet Revolution and separation from Slovakia (1990-1997); the initial years of the accession process, from the beginning of accession negotiations in 1998 until their conclusion in late 2002; the brief, but notable, period between the conclusion of accession negotiations and formal entry into the EU (December 2002-May 2004); the initial years of EU membership (2004-2008); and the six-month period of the Czech EU presidency (January-June 2009) – obviously not concluded at the time this paper was written. The paper also concentrates on three key sets of issue that are of ongoing importance to Czech foreign policy: relations with eastern (and southeastern) Europe

and Russia; transatlantic relations; and international organizations and law (including trade and human rights). Proceeding in such a fashion will allow us to trace the process of change in Czech foreign policy in each of these areas, and hopefully establish a causal relationship between these changes and EU influences, if indeed such a relationship exists. Before proceeding with the chronological narrative, however, we first provide a brief discussion of Czech foreign policy interests and their historical and geopolitical sources, as well as the main domestic factors affecting Czech foreign policy.

CZECH FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS AND DOMESTIC FACTORS

Czech foreign policy interests are defined both by the country's historical experiences and its present-day perceptions of vulnerability and weakness.¹ Historically, the Czech lands have been dominated by larger, more powerful neighbors – for centuries by Habsburg Austria, and then in the twentieth century by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Until 1989, the only modern experiences of independent statehood came in the interwar period, 1918-1938, when a democratic Czechoslovak republic was created from the ashes of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and then again briefly after the Second World War, from 1945 until the imposition of Soviet-backed communist rule in 1948. The legacy of external domination was then reinforced by Warsaw Pact military intervention to crush the “Prague Spring” reform movement in 1968.

These bitter historical experiences have underscored the main vulnerabilities and perceived weaknesses of the Czech Republic that would need to be addressed by Czech foreign policy after November 1989.² As a relatively small country in the center of Europe, the Czech Republic sought integration into Western (Euro-Atlantic) institutions to preserve its future security and independence, in the first instance against the possible threat of renewed Russian power and assertiveness. The small size of the Czech economy also necessitated integration into the larger European single market, which in turn offered both an entry into but also protection from the broader global economy. European integration also fulfilled an important psychological need for the Czech lands, which sought to reclaim their historic place at the heart of Europe and in the mainstream of European cultural and political developments. More recently, the Russian-Ukrainian gas crises in 2006 and 2009 have underscored the dependency of the Czech Republic on Russian oil and gas and its energy vulnerabilities more generally; this has led to strong

Czech support for common European energy solutions, something which was a key theme of the Czech EU presidency in 2009.

However, while historical experience has underscored the need for Czech integration into Europe, it has also taught the Czechs not to rely on the protection of Western European powers alone, thus leading to a strong interest in close ties to the United States and good transatlantic relations. Czech support for NATO and maintaining a strong US security role in Europe is further bolstered by the perceived weakness and inadequacies of EU security and defense structures.

Czech foreign policy interests, therefore, as shaped by both historical experience and perceived vulnerabilities and weaknesses, can be briefly summarized as follows: the achievement of security and prosperity through integration into Western institutions and structures – in the first instance the EU, but also NATO with a strong transatlantic relationship as a counterbalancing influence and insurance policy. This balancing act in foreign relations can also be seen in Czech preferences for the EU, where the Czech Republic can be counted among the member states generally favoring a looser and more intergovernmental form of integration (although positions on this vary among the political parties). Czech “Euroskepticism” in this regard is also influenced by historical experience and geopolitical status, as it is based to some extent on the fear of external domination (by an EU controlled by larger countries) after having only recently regained full independence and sovereignty. Beyond the EU and transatlantic relations, the Czech historical experience of victimization and domination by larger powers has also made it a strong supporter of international law and organizations and a proponent of effective multilateral cooperation. On this latter point, however, as with Czech preferences for the EU and transatlantic relations, Czech foreign policy is influenced by the views of specific national governments and leadership elites.

A key question for this paper, therefore, is how has EU membership affected Czech perceptions of basic foreign policy interests? Has EU membership modified perceptions of national security, and of the proper balance between independence and integration, and between the EU and transatlantic relations? How has it affected Czech perceptions of the external (non-EU) environment, particularly its historically dangerous and unstable eastern and southeastern neighborhoods? And finally, how has it affected Czech perceptions of global problems and the potential role of the Czech Republic as an effective international actor

Domestic factors

Beyond history and geopolitics, Czech foreign policy is also influenced by a number of domestic factors. One of these is the constitutional structure of government, which creates three main centers of power when it comes to foreign policy: the president, prime minister, and minister of foreign affairs (Pehe 1998: 63). Although the Czech constitution gives the government ultimate constitutional responsibility for foreign policy, its Article 63 also assigns a foreign policy role to the president, who despite the rather ceremonial status of the office has more power in foreign policy than in other policy areas. As the official head of state, the president represents the country abroad, ratifies international treaties, appoints ambassadors, and is the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The rather vague constitutional delimitation of foreign policy competencies between the government and president has enabled the latter to play an active role in foreign policy, thus resuming the tradition of an active presidency established by the first Czechoslovak president T. G. Masaryk (1918-1935). However, this vagueness also has become an ongoing source of tension between the two centers of executive power – the government and the president. Both presidents since 1989 – Václav Havel (1989-2003) and Václav Klaus (2003-present) – have been very active in foreign policy, often supporting and promoting views that were not in line with the official foreign policy of the government.

The foreign policy views of the two presidents could not be more different, however. A key factor influencing Havel's foreign policy views was the political thinking of Masaryk, whose political philosophy was deeply rooted in the universalist tradition emphasizing humanity and the importance of moral values in politics – a philosophy also known as “non-political politics” or “anti-politics” (Šedivý 1995: 63). Thus, after becoming president Havel emphasized such principles in international relations as the promotion of human rights, multilateralism, and international dialogue. He explained his approach as follows:

Many years of living under communism gave us certain experiences that the noncommunist West (fortunately) did not have to go through. We came to understand (or to be precise some of us did) that the only genuine values are those for which one is capable, if necessary, of sacrificing something. The traditional values of Western civilization – such as democracy, respect for human rights and for the order of nature, the freedom of the individual, and the inviolability of his

property, the feeling of co-responsibility for the world, which means the awareness that if freedom is threatened anywhere, it is threatened everywhere – all of these things become values with moral, and therefore metaphysical, underpinnings. Without intending to, the communists taught us to understand the truth of the world not as a mere information about it, but as an attitude, a commitment, a moral imperative (Havel 1994: 18).

Klaus' foreign policy views, on the other hand, are influenced by his neoliberal economic thinking, and can be described in terms of the realist paradigm of international relations that is the polar opposite of Havel's universalism (idealism). Among the key features of Klaus' foreign policy philosophy are an emphasis on protecting national interests, a limited interest in multilateralism (exceptions being Czech membership in the EU and NATO), and the preference for an intergovernmental (as opposed to supranational) approach to European integration. Klaus personified and represented the shift in Czech foreign policy from idealism to realism that occurred after the June 1992 elections – a process completed by the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993 and the coming to power of the new Klaus-led government of the Czech Republic (Šedivý 1995: 69).

Within the government, the prime minister and foreign minister each have a key role to play in making foreign policy. While as the head of government the prime minister sets the main objectives of foreign policy, the foreign minister also disposes of considerable authority and some independence in this area, creating the potential for disagreement if the two actors have differing views. The potential for disagreement is particularly acute when the two foreign policy actors come from different political parties, which is often the case in the multi-party coalition governments that are typical of the Czech Republic's parliamentary system. Making matters worse, the Czech constitution does not provide for effective constitutional mechanisms to “ensure that all three centers of foreign policy [speak] the same language,” thus creating considerable potential for discord in cases of partisan or ideological differences between the individuals holding these positions (Pehe 1998: 63).

Further complicating things, the three foreign policy centers were extended to four in 1998 when Prime Minister Miloš Zeman divided the foreign policy portfolio between the foreign minister (Jan Kavan) and the newly established position of deputy prime minister for security and defense policy, held by Egon Lánský. This arrangement did

not prove very functional, however, and was abolished after Lánský resigned from the government in December 1999. However, another extension to four foreign policy centers took place in January 2007, when Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek established the position of deputy prime minister for European affairs. This new position, held by Alexandr Vondra, was given primary responsibility for EU affairs in the Czech Republic, with one of its major tasks being government preparations for the Czech EU presidency in 2009.

Given the nature of the Czech Republic's parliamentary system and coalition government, political parties and party politics exert a major influence on foreign policy (Drulák 2008: 11). While the main political parties excepting the Communists – the Civic Democrats (ODS), Social Democrats (ČSSD), Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL), and Greens – all accept the main integrationist and internationalist principles of Czech foreign policy, key differences of orientation have emerged between “Atlanticists,” who favor closer ties to the US over more EU integration – chiefly the ODS – and “Europeanists,” who favor closer European integration over perceived subordination to the US – mainly the Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Greens. The Communists, for their part, adhere to an “autonomist” position that rejects membership in NATO and is more critical of the EU, a position shared to an increasing extent by President Klaus after 2003 (Drulák 2008: 7-10). These partisan differences have grown since the Iraq war in 2003 and EU accession in 2004, making domestic party politics an increasingly important factor affecting Czech foreign policy. In the early years after the Velvet Revolution, by contrast, the relative weakness of political parties, the strong cross-party consensus on joining the EU and NATO (excepting the Communists), and the still-developing nature of Czech political institutions (the parliament, state administration, etc.) gave leading individuals such as Havel and Klaus exceptional influence over foreign policy, imposing few domestic constraints on their decisions and lending special importance to their personal views and philosophies (Wallat 2001).

Public opinion is another important domestic factor affecting foreign policy. In the initial decade or so after the Velvet Revolution foreign and security policy were “on the fringe rather than at the center of Czech political and public debate,” thus limiting the influence of public opinion on foreign policy while reinforcing the role of key individuals (Wallat 2001: 27). The Czech public generally expressed satisfaction with the government's foreign policy, and supported the main foreign policy goals of joining the EU and NATO. Nevertheless, differences among various societal groups existed. In

particular, ideology was a key differentiating factor, with those of a more leftist political orientation tending to be more critical of the government and politics, including foreign policy (STEM 2003). Interest in foreign policy has grown in recent years, however, in connection with the two main foreign policy issues since 2003 – the US-led war in Iraq and the American plans for constructing missile defense facilities in the Czech Republic and Poland. Along with this growing public interest has come a growing divergence of public opinion on foreign policy. As a consequence, public opinion could become an increasingly important factor influencing Czech foreign policy in the future.

THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD (1990-1997)

In the immediate aftermath of the November 1989 Velvet Revolution, the main foreign policy priorities of the Czechoslovak government were establishing the country's full independence and sovereignty and integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Achieving the former goals meant securing the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak soil (accomplished in June 1991) and abolition of the Warsaw Pact, which occurred in July 1991 due to joint pressure from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. The idealistic political leadership of post-revolutionary Czechoslovakia – composed mainly of former dissidents and Charter 77 members such as President Václav Havel and Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier – also initially argued for the elimination of NATO and the replacement of Cold War military structures with a new pan-European security framework based on a reformed Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (CSFR 1990). The idea had gained almost no support among other European states, however, and by the end of 1990 Czechoslovak officials had already scaled back their plans for a pan-European security system and turned their attention to existing international institutions (Šedivý 1995: 61-9).

The main vehicle of post-communist Czechoslovakia's "return to Europe" was membership in the European Community (EC), which the new government began to pursue as early as December 1989. In December 1990, Prague and the governments of Poland and Hungary opened negotiations on association agreements with the EC. The so-called Europe Agreements that were eventually signed in December 1991 offered the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) the gradual liberalization of trade and increased economic and political cooperation, but they did not include a statement offering these countries a firm prospect of EC membership, something which had been a major goal of the CEECs. In this regard, and in others (the maintenance by the EC of

trade restrictions in “sensitive” sectors such as agriculture and steel), the agreements were a disappointment.

To increase their joint prospects of success in negotiations with the Soviet Union and the EC, the Czechoslovak government sought closer cooperation with Poland and Hungary. An initial meeting between these governments – initiated by Havel and Dienstbier – took place in April 1990 in Bratislava, and in February 1991 the “Visegrad group” (named after the Hungarian town in which the meeting took place) was formally established as a framework for regional cooperation (Rhodes 1999: 51).

Establishment of the Visegrad group reflected the general preference of the early Czechoslovak leadership for cooperative and multilateral approaches to foreign policy and international relations. Overall, the Czechoslovak government pursued an “ambitious and idealist” foreign policy in the first year after independence. This included unsuccessful attempts to mediate international conflicts in the Middle East, Cambodia, and elsewhere; pleas for the West to increase its economic assistance to Russia; and support for German reunification, with Havel even issuing a controversial apology for Czechoslovakia’s expulsion of ethnic German after World War II. This agenda essentially reflected the idealistic (and moralistic) orientations and beliefs of Havel and the other former dissidents who were the major foreign policy decision-makers at this time (Šedivý 1995: 63; Wallat 2001: 17-18).

Czechoslovak foreign policy began to take a more “realist” turn after 1990, however. The main reasons for this reorientation were the growing internal tensions between Czechs and Slovaks – which increasingly absorbed government attention, and would eventually lead to the breakup of the state in January 1993 – and a more unstable and threatening external environment, with the growing influence of hardliners and the military in the Soviet Union, exemplified by military interventions in Lithuania and Latvia in January 1991 and the failed coup attempt against President Gorbachev in August 1991, and conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The Persian Gulf War in 1990/91 also led to a positive reevaluation of NATO’s effectiveness, while the inability of the CSCE to deal with the conflicts in Yugoslavia led to a diminished view of that organization’s effectiveness and ability to provide security (Šedivý 1995: 68; Wallat 2001: 18-19). Thus, the Czechoslovak government began moving away from its initial flirtation with European security alternatives and towards a full focus on NATO membership

The Klaus era (1992-1997)

The turn towards realism in Czech foreign policy was accelerated by the June 1992 election of a new Czech government (which became the government of the Czech Republic after the Velvet Divorce with Slovakia in 1993). In contrast to the idealism and multilateralism of the Czechoslovak dissidents, the new leadership of Prime Minister Václav Klaus and Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec favored unilateralism, bilateralism, and a generally more narrow and pessimistic foreign policy approach (Šedivý 1995: 67-9; Wallat 2001: 20). This new approach included a more skeptical view of the EC (after October 1993 the EU), which the Thatcherite Klaus perceived as being too socialistic and bureaucratic, and posing a threat to national sovereignty and identity. Thus, while the government's official goal of EU membership remained, Czech government actions (or lack of them, more precisely, when it came to making legal and institutional preparations for membership) led some to doubt the sincerity of this goal (Pehe 1995: 15).

The unilateralism of the Klaus government was also reflected in changing attitudes towards regional cooperation within the Visegrad framework. In contrast to Havel and the previous government, Klaus was basically opposed to closer cooperation within the (since 1993, with the addition of Slovakia) four-country Visegrad group, which he derided as a "poor man's club." Instead, he favored the development of a regional free-trade zone within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA). In January 1994, Klaus provoked the ire of other Visegrad governments by rejecting a joint approach at the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) summit in Prague, insisting instead on bilateral meetings with US President Clinton (Rhodes 1999: 52-3).

A major reason for the Klaus government's rejection of Visegrad cooperation was its belief (mistaken, as it turned out) that the Czech Republic was more advanced than other post-communist states when it came to economic transformation, and thus was a front-runner among these countries in the race for EU membership. Regional cooperation with less advanced countries, the Klaus government felt, would only hold the Czech Republic back and delay its accession to the EU. This mistaken view was also supported by the fact that the geopolitical center of gravity of the Czech Republic had shifted westwards due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the split with Slovakia (Šedivý 1995: 67; Barany 1995: 56). In particular, the Klaus government appeared to agree with the view that new foreign policy opportunities for the Czech Republic had been created by the latter development. By detaching the Czech Republic

“from the economically and politically unstable and potentially conflict-ridden regions in eastern and southern Europe,” and by locating the new state further from the borders of the former Soviet Union, it was argued, the separation from Slovakia had removed a “major obstacle ... to the possible speedy incorporation of the Czech Republic in Western structures” (Winkler 1996: 9).

The Czech Republic’s internationalist president, Václav Havel (1993-2003), was highly critical of the “go-it-alone” foreign policy of the Klaus government, and he sought to counterbalance it by inaugurating a new series of informal discussions among the presidents of the four Visegrad countries plus Germany, Austria, and Slovenia. The so-called Litomyšl meetings – named after the Czech location of the initial meeting in April 1994 – never amounted to much, however, mainly because the figures involved occupied largely ceremonial positions with little substantive executive power. Nor were the Litomyšl meetings successful in reviving the Visegrad process. If anything, their existence underscored the stagnation of the Visegrad forum and the Klaus government’s disinterest in regional cooperation, which the prime minister himself derided as “empty regionalism” (Rhodes 1999: 52-3).

Havel’s efforts notwithstanding, the uncooperative and sometimes arrogant foreign policy approach of the Klaus government led to a deterioration of the Czech Republic’s relations with most neighboring countries. This included relations with Germany, whose support the Czechs needed in order to secure the key goal of EU membership. Not only were Czech-German relations heavily freighted with mutual historical grievances, but the Euro-pessimistic views of Klaus also clashed directly with the more pro-European views of German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Bilateral relations only began to improve with the signing of a new Czech-German declaration of goodwill in January 1997, following two years of contentious negotiations initiated by President Havel. Relations with Poland – the Czech Republic’s other large neighbor – also suffered, especially after the January 1994 P4P summit. Czech-Polish relations improved somewhat after 1995, but only once the Czech government began to view this as necessary to secure a place in the first waves of NATO and EU enlargement (Wallat 2001: 23; Pehe 1998).

In the end, the Czech Republic was formally invited, along with Poland and Hungary, to join NATO in July 1997 with formal accession occurring in March 1999. Thus, a major goal of Czech foreign policy was accomplished. However, while the Klaus government strongly favored NATO membership, there was not much public discussion of this objective domestically, and public support for NATO membership in

the Czech Republic remained somewhat below what it was in Poland and Hungary.³ Replicating the EU situation, the Czech government's official support for NATO membership was also not matched by military reforms and other preparations necessary for membership, generating some uncertainty about the country's NATO bid until it was formally invited to join (Wallat 2001: 21).

THE ACCESSION PROCESS (1998-2002)

In this period, and until formal accession in May 2004, EU membership remained the key goal and pursuit of Czech foreign policy. At the same time, Czech foreign policy was being increasingly shaped by EU membership preparations and integration into the EU and NATO frameworks. Domestic factors also exerted a key influence over foreign policy however, especially elections and party politics.

CFSP alignment and the accession process

Integration into EU foreign policy actually began well before the formal launching of the accession process in 1998. In preparation for membership, the Czech Republic and other candidate states were expected to align themselves with EU policies and principles, in CFSP as in other areas. The process of foreign policy alignment was a key goal of the EU's pre-accession strategy. According to a 1994 Commission document, "The goal for the period before accession should be the progressive integration of the political and economic systems, *as well as the foreign and security policies of the [prospective candidate states] and the Union*, together with increasing cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs, so as to create an increasingly unified area (European Commission 1994: 1; emphasis added).

Because it is a matter of intergovernmental agreement, CFSP does not involve the legal instruments (directives, regulations) that exist for other EU policies. As a consequence, unlike other aspects of the *acquis communautaire*, there is no body of CFSP legislation and rules that must be transposed to national legislation and implemented by the candidate states. Instead, the *acquis politique* consists mainly of previous joint actions, common positions, statements, and declarations, all of which the candidate states are expected to accept. The candidate states must also align their own national policies to the basic principles and goals of CFSP. According to a 2002 Commission document, "as member states [the candidate countries] must undertake to give active and unconditional support to the implementation of the common foreign and

security policy in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity. Member states must ensure that their national policies conform to the common positions and defend these common positions in international fora” (European Commission 2002: 81). Significant alignment with CFSP principles and positions is therefore expected of candidate states before accession.

For the Czech Republic and other CEECs, this process of alignment began with the Europe Agreements that were signed in December 1991. While the main focus of the Europe Agreements was the liberalization of trade, they also provided a framework for intensified political relations between individual CEECs and the EU, including institutionalized bilateral meetings at various levels to discuss matters of common concern. A key goal of this so-called “political dialogue” was closer cooperation on foreign policy matters (*Bulletin of the European Communities*, 12-1991: 95).

The June 1993 Copenhagen European Council, which accepted the idea of eastward enlargement in principle and issued the now famous “Copenhagen criteria” for membership, called for reinforcing this bilateral political dialogue with a multilateral cooperative framework. The multilateral political dialogue would cover a number of policy areas of common interest, including CFSP. It would include regular meetings between the presidents of the European Council and Commission with their counterparts from the associated CEECs, and the possibility of joint meetings of all the heads of state and government to discuss certain predetermined issues. For CFSP in particular, it would include: Troika meetings at the level of foreign ministers and a meeting at the political directors level during each six-month EU presidency; briefings at secretariat level after each General Affairs Council (foreign ministers) meeting and each meeting of the political directors; and one Troika meeting at working group level per presidency for relevant working groups (European Council 1993: 86 and 92).

In March 1994, the Council went even further and approved a plan for enhanced foreign policy cooperation with the associated CEECs. This plan included a number of elements:

- Yearly meetings between the rotating EU presidency, the Commission, and the heads of state or government of the CEECs.
- Briefings for CEEC ambassadors given by the EU presidency following each European Council meeting.
- Special General Affairs Council meetings with CEEC foreign ministers to discuss CFSP issues.

- Political directors' meetings (in the form of sittings of the Political Committee) with the CEECs in advance of regular European Council meetings.
- Meetings of experts and special working groups to discuss CFSP issues, especially security, terrorism, and human rights.
- The opportunity for the CEECs to associate themselves jointly with EU statements on specific foreign policy issues and to jointly back *démarches* issued by the EU.
- The possibility of collective involvement by the CEECs in EU joint foreign policy actions.
- More formal cooperation between the EU and CEECs within international organizations and at international conferences, with the possibility that the CEECs would be invited to coordinate their positions with that of the EU.
- The appointment by the CEECs of "shadow European correspondents" in order to facilitate foreign policy coordination with the EU.
- The promotion of more regular contacts between the EU's missions to non-member countries and international organizations and conferences and CEEC missions.
- The possibility of increased cooperation between the diplomatic services of the member states, the Commission, and the CEECs (*Bulletin of the European Union*, 3-1994, 68).

The goal of integrating the CEECs into CFSP was also emphasized by the Essen European Council in December 1994. At Essen, the European Council approved a Commission report outlining a general pre-accession strategy for the EU. The report stated that with respect to CFSP the primary objectives of this strategy were: 1) spreading stability and security throughout the post-communist zone in Europe by making the CEECs feel more included in the Western security sphere; and 2) familiarizing the CEECs with CFSP procedures and providing them an opportunity to align with EU positions and policies (European Council 1994: 159).

Performance in terms of alignment with CFSP goals and principles was an important factor examined by the Commission in the formal accession process (which began in March 1998 for some candidate countries and ended in December 2002 for all but Bulgaria and Romania). In the Commission's formal "Opinions" on the applications of each of the ten CEECs that were published in June 1997, the foreign policies of each applicant were briefly evaluated along with their ability to fulfill EU obligations in this area. In the case of the Czech Republic, the Commission noted approvingly the Czech

Republic's participation in common dialogue arrangements with the EU and its support for CFSP actions; its membership in international organizations, including the UN and OSCE, and its preparations for NATO and WEU membership; its participation in NATO operations in Bosnia (IFOR/SFOR); its resolution of territorial disputes with neighboring countries; its sizable diplomatic service, giving it the potential to play a role in CFSP as a member state; and its support for WMD non-proliferation treaties and export-control regimes for dual-use technologies. The Commission reported that it found no serious problems in the CFSP area, leading it to conclude that, "as a member [the Czech Republic] could effectively fulfill its obligations in [the CFSP] field" (European Commission 1997: 73).

The Commission also evaluated the foreign policy performance and alignment with CFSP of each candidate state in the annual "Progress Reports" on preparations for accession that it published for each applicant, beginning in November 1998. In its progress reports for the Czech Republic for 1998-2002, the Commission noted generally satisfactory progress in aligning Czech foreign policy with CFSP, and with administrative and legislative adaptations that would allow the Czech Republic to more effectively participate in CFSP once it became a member. Among the former was the reorganization of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in spring 2000 to create the posts of Political Director and European Correspondent, and the creation in May 2002 of a department for CFSP matters within the MFA.⁴

Alignment with CFSP proved to be a relatively easy task for the candidate states, and the CFSP chapter was among the first to be "provisionally closed" by most CEECs in formal accession negotiations with the EU. In the Commission's December 2002 chapter-by-chapter "Guide to the Negotiations," it was reported that "All candidate countries have accepted the [CFSP] acquis and there is a good level of alignment with basic principles" (European Commission 2002: 81). In its November 2003 "Comprehensive Monitoring Report," the final assessment issued by the Commission before formal accession in May 2004, the Commission noted some remaining adjustments to domestic legislation that needed to be made to enable the Czech Republic to participate in EU economic sanctions measures, and it urged enhanced implementation of EU arms export measures. Nonetheless, it concluded: "The Czech Republic is essentially meeting the commitments and requirements arising from the accession negotiations in the chapter on the [CFSP], and it is expected to be able to

participate in the political dialogue and to align with EU statements, sanctions and restrictive measures by accession” (European Commission 2003: 50).

The Tošovský and ČSSD minority governments (1998-2002)

The accession and alignment process coincided with a sharp change in the style and substance of Czech foreign policy, but these were largely the product of domestic politics rather than external influences. The fall of the Klaus government in late 1997 led to an interim caretaker government under the leadership of National Bank Governor Josef Tošovský. New national elections in June 1998 then resulted in the formation of a minority coalition government led by the Social Democrats, who continued governing until 2006 (after winning re-election in 2002). Both the Tošovský and ČSSD governments rededicated the Czech Republic to the goal of EU membership, and they sought to improve Czech relations with the EU, which had been strained under Klaus. In contrast to the previous Klaus government, the two governments also gave renewed emphasis to multilateralism and participation in international organizations. They also revived the process of central European regional cooperation within the Visegrad format, and they endeavored to improve relations with neighboring countries.⁵ In March 1999, the ČSSD overcame its initial skepticism about NATO and led the Czech Republic into the Western military alliance.

However, the ČSSD’s skepticism about NATO membership – which mirrored broader public opinion – as well as broad public sympathy for Serbia-Yugoslavia (a legacy of the communist period, when many Czechs vacationed in the former Yugoslavia), contributed to an uncertain response by the Czech government to NATO’s March 1999 decision to launch air strikes against Serbia in defense of the Kosovar Albanians. After some hesitancy, and initial denial that it had agreed to the air strikes, the Czech government finally voiced its support for NATO’s actions. However, it also launched an unsuccessful mediation attempt with Greece, another pro-Serbia country, in an effort to end the air strikes and reach a peace agreement. The Czech hesitancy over the Kosovo war also reflected a split in the governing ČSSD between pro-NATO “internationalists” and “Europeanists,” as well as conflicting external constraints imposed by the need to cooperate with an internationalist president (Havel) and the Atlanticist ODS, which was supporting the minority government through an opposition agreement (Drulák 2008: 8).

Reflecting both strong national interest in the Balkans and increased integration into NATO and EU foreign policy, the Czech Republic became an increasingly active player in this region after 1998. Having already supplied troops for NATO operations in Bosnia (IFOR/SFOR) beginning in 1996, the Czech government also contributed to the NATO forces in Kosovo (KFOR) in 1999 and Macedonia (Operation “Essential Harvest”) in 2001. In late 2002, it agreed to contribute officers to the new EU police mission in (EUPM) in Bosnia. The Czech Republic was also an active participant in the EU-led Stability Pact for the Western Balkans that was launched in 1999, initially as an observer and from 2001 as a full member. It also contributed to OSCE election observer missions in Montenegro, Kosovo, and Bosnia.

Even though it was not yet a member of the EU, the Czech Republic also became an active and interested participant in efforts to develop the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) beginning in 1999. At the first ESDP Capabilities Commitment Conference in November 2000 and the follow-up Capabilities Improvement Conference in November 2001, it offered 1,000 troops for the planned EU Rapid Reaction Force and 100 policemen for the EU police force. By contributing officers to the EU police mission in Bosnia in 2002, it became a part of the first ESDP operation. Nevertheless, the Czech government remained somewhat ambivalent about ESDP, fearing that it could compete with and undermine NATO. Within NATO, meanwhile, outside of the Balkans the Czech Republic also contributed to NATO forces in Afghanistan (ISAF) in 2002.

Also reflecting the multilateralist orientation of the post-Klaus governments, the Czech Republic took on a more active role in other international organizations after 1997, including the OSCE, Council of Europe, and the UN. In particular the Czech Republic began to carve out for itself a prominent role in promoting human rights, viewing this as an area in which it could add value due to its experience as a former totalitarian country that had successfully managed the transition to democracy (Šedivý 2003: 9). The country’s active role in this field was also strengthened by the distinctive reputation of President Václav Havel as a worldwide human rights campaigner. In focusing on international human rights, the Czech government reengaged on an issue that had been a hallmark of the first post-communist government of Czechoslovakia.⁶

THE POST-NEGOTIATION INTERREGNUM (December 2002-May 2004)

Efforts to develop a common European foreign policy encountered a major setback with the intra-European split on Iraq that emerged in early 2003. In this dispute, the Czech Republic and nine other CEEC's joined several Western European countries (and a number of prospective candidates for EU membership from the western Balkans) in backing the US position on Iraq, which endorsed the possible use of force against Iraq without a further UN Security Council Resolution. The split first emerged into the open with a letter published in the *Wall Street Journal* on 30 January that expressed solidarity with the US position on Iraq. The letter was signed by Czech President Havel and the leaders of Poland, Hungary, and five EU member states (the UK, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Denmark). This was followed one week later by the release of a memorandum backing US policy that was signed by the governments of seven other CEECs (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovenia) as well as Croatia, Macedonia, and Albania.

The letter and memorandum provoked an immediate and strong response from some EU member states, especially the French government, which was leading the anti-war bloc. One consequence was that the candidate states were barred from attending an emergency EU summit in Brussels on February 17, whose goal was to forge a united EU position on the Iraq issue. France and Germany in particular felt that the presence of these governments would only strengthen the pro-US position of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Then, at a post-summit press conference French President Chirac launched a memorable tirade against the CEECs, calling their actions "dangerous, reckless, not very well behaved." The behavior of the CEECs, he continued, was "childish" and they were "badly brought up." They "had missed a great opportunity to shut up." Moreover, Chirac warned the CEECs that their entry into the EU was not yet assured, with the national parliaments of member states still required to ratify the Accession Treaties for each of the candidate countries (which, in fact, had not yet been formally signed; this would happen on 16 April 2003, at an EU summit meeting in Athens, Greece) (Dempsey 2003: 4).

The initial Czech response to this attack was equally sharp. According to Czech foreign minister Cyril Svoboda, "We are not joining the EU so we can sit and shut up" (Parker and Blitz 2003: 4). Moreover, the Czechs and other CEECs defended themselves against the accusation that they had not properly aligned themselves with EU policy by pointing out, quite correctly, that prior to the February 17 joint declaration

(which itself represented a fairly loose compromise), there was no EU common position on Iraq for the CEECs to ignore or break from. What existed instead were a collection of diverse national views that were coalescing around two poles: an anti-war position championed by France and Germany (with Belgium also playing a vocal role), and a pro-US view endorsing the possible use of military force that was advocated by the UK, Spain, and Italy. In siding with the latter position, the CEECs were not breaking from an established common position of the EU, but from the Franco-German position that was consolidated at the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Elysee Treaty in mid-January 2003. Chirac's pique over the behavior of the CEECs was probably as much a response to this overt rebellion against Franco-German leadership as anything, since it substantiated the fears of many French political elites that enlargement would undermine traditional Franco-German (read French) leadership of Europe and lead to the emergence of a more loosely governed and less cohesive EU. At any rate, after the February 17 summit, after being briefed by the EU, the Czech Republic and other CEECs uniformly endorsed the joint declaration on Iraq that was agreed to by the member states (RFE/RL 2003a).

Following the emergency EU summit, in subsequent days and weeks the Czech government backtracked to a more centrist position, in some cases trying to place themselves, as Czech Prime Minister Vladimir Spidla (2002-2004) put it, "precisely in the middle between the US and EU." While the Czech government contributed troops to the US-led coalition in Iraq,⁷ it also avoided making strong public statements of support for war. This re-positioning no doubt reflected a desire to repair relations with France and Germany, but it also took into account intense public opposition to the war in the Czech Republic.⁸ As with the Kosovo war, the ambivalence of the Social Democrats on Iraq also reflected internal party divisions between internationalists and Europeanists, as well as the influence of more internationalist coalition partners – the Christian Democrats, who were the party of Foreign Minister Svoboda, and the Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US-DEU) (Drulák 2008: 8).

The Czech repositioning also reflected the circumstances which had placed Prague in the pro-US camp to begin with: the January letter had been signed by President Havel, not the Czech prime minister or any other representative of the Czech government, and he had done so on his own initiative, without prior consultation with the government. Moreover, Havel himself was in his final days as president, to be succeeded in February by Klaus. The rebalancing of Czech policy on Iraq, therefore,

was perhaps inevitable after the government was bounced into its initial strong support for the US by a lame duck president. This new balance was also reflected by the views of the new President Klaus, who on an April 2003 trip to Germany argued that while he was personally opposed to the Iraq war he did not want a confrontation with the United States, nor did he want the Czech Republic to be forced to choose between the Franco-German or US-UK camps (EUobserver 2003).

As the blow-up over Iraq subsided, the Czech government continued seeking a balanced position between the Franco-German and Atlanticist camps. The Czechs were critical of Franco-German efforts, at a 29 April mini-summit Brussels (also attended by the leaders of Belgium and Luxembourg), to create new military planning structures for the EU outside of NATO. The Czech government was also critical of a compromise plan agreed to in November 2003 by the UK, France, and Germany for a separate EU military headquarters, arguing that it would be a wasteful duplication of resources and would ultimately undermine NATO and the transatlantic alliance (RFE/RL 2003b). However, it regarded the agreement that was eventually reached in 2004, on the creation of a small EU civil-military planning cell linked to NATO, as an acceptable compromise.

At the 2002-2003 Convention on the Future of Europe, tasked with developing guidelines for a new constitutional treaty for the EU, and in which the Czech Republic and other accession states participated as observers, there was general Czech support for strengthening CFSP, including merging the functions of the High Representative for CFSP and the Commissioner for External Relations to create the new post of European Foreign Minister, and the use of “enhanced cooperation” procedures to make decisions when not all member states were in agreement. However, the Czech government continued to have concerns about the development of ESDP. The Czech Republic, along with most other CEECs, opposed the creation of independent European defense structures outside of the NATO framework, which they feared would undermine NATO and the transatlantic relationship and weaken the US security commitment to Europe (Motřková and Khol 2003). Instead, the Czech government preferred the development of a stronger EU defense identity within NATO, as foreseen by the December 2002 “Berlin-Plus” agreement permitting the use of NATO assets by EU security operations (Cameron and Primatarova 2003: 5).

After the signing of the Accession Treaty on 17 April 2003, the Czech Republic and other accession states graduated to the status of “active observers” in the CFSP.

This allowed them to participate in CFSP meetings at all levels, giving them the chance to shape CFSP from the inside rather than simply being informed about decisions after they had been made. Full voting rights in CFSP decision-making would have to await formal accession in May 2004, however.

THE INITIAL YEARS OF MEMBERSHIP (May 2004-2008)

Since becoming a member state the Czech Republic has sought to maintain its “careful balancing act between Atlanticist and European security profiles” (Khol 2008: 84). It has remained a strong supporter of NATO, and Czech forces have participated in NATO operations in Kosovo (KFOR), Iraq (NTM-I), and Afghanistan (ISAF). The Czech Republic also contributes troops to and is a strong supporter of the NATO Response Force.

However, relations with the US were affected by the controversy over American missile defense plans that ignited in summer 2006, with reports that the Pentagon had requested money for the construction of missile defense facilities in central Europe and a visit by US experts to survey potential sites in the Czech Republic. While discussions with the United States on the missile defense plans were begun by the ČSSD-led government, the project was also supported by the ODS-led coalition government that was formed in 2007 after parliamentary elections the previous year. However, the missile defense plans faced substantial public opposition, as well as opposition from the main non-government parties (the ČSSD and the Communists). Many in the EU were also upset by the Czech government’s decision to negotiate bilaterally with the United States without consulting other European countries. An agreement on the construction of missile defense facilities was signed by the US and Czech governments in July 2008. However, in early 2009 the Czech government faced the prospect that the new Obama administration might cancel the missile defense plans as part of a broader agreement with Russia entailing Moscow’s support for other US objectives (pressure on Iran to end its uranium enrichment program, the war in Afghanistan, etc.).⁹

While NATO remained the primary security reference for the Czech Republic after 2004, the Czech Republic has also gradually warmed to the idea of a stronger ESDP, especially one more engaged in the tasks of conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict resolution. The Czech Republic has participated in all ESDP operations in the Balkans: Concordia and Proxima in Macedonia, the EU police mission in Bosnia, and Althea in Bosnia, where the EU took over the NATO mission led by SFOR. The Czech

Republic also participated in the EU's effort, initiated in 2004, to create a number of multinational "battle groups," agreeing with Germany and Austria to form one such group by 2009 (later postponed to 2011), and with Slovakia on another to be formed by 2009. It has also played an active role in the European Capabilities Action Plan (Khol 2008: 92-3). The Czech Republic also participated in the EU's civilian mission in Kosovo beginning in December 2008, so far the largest ESDP operation ever launched.

While Czech support for ESDP increased under the leadership of the center-left government that was formed after the June 2002 parliamentary elections, it was also influenced by strong public opposition to the US-led war in Iraq. Czech support for ESDP dissipated somewhat after the 2006 parliamentary elections and the formation in 2007 of an ODS-led government that was decidedly more Atlanticist and pro-US in orientation. However, a sharp swing in policy was blocked by the inclusion in the government coalition of the Christian Democrats and Greens, both more favorably disposed to increased EU cooperation in foreign and defense policy. While overall Czech support for ESDP has grown since accession, the Czech Republic nevertheless continues to view NATO as the main security framework for Europe, although it favors a stronger EU identity and role within NATO.¹⁰

Since becoming a member state, the Czech Republic has sought an active profile within CFSP. Key regional priorities for Czech foreign policy are the Western Balkans and the Eastern European neighborhood, including the Southern Caucasus. The Czechs have been strong supporters of the stabilization and association process in the Western Balkans, and all Czech ESDP deployments have been in this region. It also strongly supports further EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, with its preferred candidates for membership being Croatia followed by Serbia and Montenegro. The Czech Republic followed the lead of the United States and major European powers in recognizing Kosovo's independence in February 2008, although not without some hesitation – the result of traditional ties to Serbia, sensitivity to neighboring Slovakia's critical position due to concerns about separatism within its own borders, and historically-based objections to large powers deciding the fate of smaller countries (analogy with Munich 1938). President Klaus also opposed the government's recognition of Kosovo (EU Consent 2008: 75). There are split views among and within political parties on Turkish membership, however, with the ČSSD for, the Christian Democrats against, the ODS divided (ODS Prime Minister Topolánek has spoken in favor of Turkey, as has

President Klaus), and the majority of public opinion against Turkish membership (EU Consent 2008: 76).¹¹

In Eastern Europe, the Czech government has been a strong supporter of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), initiated in 2004, and the follow-up Eastern Partnership Initiative that was proposed by Poland and Sweden in May 2008 (see next section). In general, however, the Czech government has argued that the EU has not paid enough attention and devoted sufficient resources to its eastern neighbors, compared to its southern (North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean) neighborhood. In recent years the Czech Republic has played a key role in promoting democracy and human rights in Belarus. It also has strong bilateral ties to Ukraine, including regular consultations between the foreign ministries of the two countries and projects that assist Ukraine in aligning its legislation with EU rules (for instance, nuclear safety and phytosanitary standards).

A key instrument of the Czech government in pushing its Eastern policy interests within the EU has been the Visegrad group, which the Czech Republic and the other three Visegrad states have reinvigorated since 2004 as a means of cooperating and exerting greater joint influence within the EU and over CFSP (Dangerfield 2008). A major focus of Visegrad Group (V4) activities has been the improvement of ties to the Eastern neighbors. During its one-year presidency of the Visegrad Group (June 2007-June 2008), the Czech Republic pursued a special liaison program with Ukraine that had been previously launched in 2005, as well as ongoing programs aimed at improving relations with Moldova and promoting democratization in Belarus. It also prioritized building stronger ties to and encouraging reform in the Southern Caucasus, where Georgia is an especially important partner (EU Consent 2008: 117).¹² Czech Eastern policies within the V4 arrangement were later elevated to the EU level, as priorities for the Czech EU presidency in the first half of 2009.

The Czech Republic has adopted a generally critical or cautious stance towards Russia common to the post-communist new member states, although it is not as hostile towards Russia as Poland and the Baltic states. Some improvement in Czech-Russian relations began in 2003, with the fall visit of President Klaus to Russia, followed by the March 2006 visit by Russian President Putin to Prague. However, Czech-Russian relations cooled under the impact of successive natural gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine (in 2006 and 2009) that affected Czech energy supplies and Russia's military incursion into Georgia in August 2008. The Czech government condemned the Russian

military action against Georgia, comparing it to the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. However, President Klaus was more sympathetic to the Russian view that Georgia bore substantial responsibility for the war (Drulák 2008: 26-7).

Continuing a trend established after 1997, as an EU member state the Czech Republic has continued its active engagement on international human rights issues, within the UN, Council of Europe, the OSCE and other international organizations. As the government stated in its 2005 Report on Czech Foreign Policy, “Promoting human rights principles in multilateral forums (...) has become an enduring priority of Czech foreign policy” (MFA 2005: 327). The Czech Republic became especially vocal over the human rights situation in Cuba. In 2005, it supported the view that sanctions applied to Cuba in 2003 should be prolonged. Although it failed to convince other member states on this issue and the sanctions were suspended, it successfully pressed for a toughening-up the EU communiqué to the Cuban government, which appealed for the release of political prisoners and condemned the persecution of political opponents and foreign visitors. Despite being in the minority on this issue, the Czech Republic continued its critical approach toward the EU’s dialogue with Cuba in subsequent years. In June 2008, the Czech government unsuccessfully opposed the formal lifting of EU sanctions against Cuba, although it was able to secure the attachment of a number of “political conditions” to this action (Euractiv 2008a). The Czech Republic has also been a strong supporter and participant in UN activities in the areas of conflict prevention, post-conflict stabilization, assistance to refugees and humanitarian aid, the fight against international crime and the drug trade, and economic development (MFA 2003: 110)

THE CZECH EU PRESIDENCY (January-June 2009)

Under slogan “Europe without barriers” the Czech Republic assumed the EU’s rotating presidency in January 2009, becoming only the second Central and Eastern European new member state to do so (following Slovenia, in the first half of 2008). Among the benefits of the EU presidency is the opportunity to set (or at least greatly influence) the EU’s policy agenda for the six-month period. In its “Work Program” for the EU presidency, the Czech government set three key priorities, the so-called three E’s – Economy, Energy, and EU in the World (Czech EU Presidency 2009a). While the latter priority explicitly targeted external policy, the other two also had important international dimensions that reflected Czech foreign policy interests.

Under the first priority (Economy), the Czech Republic had assumed the EU presidency in the midst of global economic and financial crisis. It therefore sought to achieve coordinated European action to restore economic growth, but also to ensure that the EU made a coordinated contribution to global efforts at financial system reform, especially at the April G-20 summit in London. The Czech government also pledged to fight against protectionist impulses in the EU and globally, and to push for the extension of the global free trade system.

Under the second priority (Energy), the Czech government sought to promote both internal and external EU measures to improve energy security. Externally, this included efforts to improve relations with foreign energy suppliers, and to diversify sources and suppliers of energy. In this context, the Czech government placed special emphasis on advancing plans for construction of the “southern corridor,” a pipeline system for transporting oil and natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe that would bypass Russia. This goal was a clear reflection of Czech national interests, given the country’s heavy dependence on Russian oil and gas.¹³ The Czech government also pledged to help build a consensus for a new global climate change treaty, possibly to be signed in December 2009 in Copenhagen.

Regarding the priority of EU in the World, the Czech government promised to push for further enlargement, with an immediate focus on Croatia. It also emphasized continued support for the Stability and Association process in the Western Balkans. While promising to continue to support the Southern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy, the Czech government indicated that it would give special emphasis to the Eastern dimension of ENP, promising to push forward the Eastern Partnership Initiative that had been proposed by Poland and Sweden in May 2008. The Czech government also pledged to help develop a unified EU approach to Russia. Improved transatlantic relations were also high on the external policy agenda of the Czech EU presidency, especially given the recent election of the internationalist Barack Obama as the new US president, as was more effective cooperation between the EU and NATO on defense. The Czech government also pledged to support EU efforts to promote international development, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as its work in the areas of conflict resolution, nuclear non-proliferation, and the struggle against terrorism.

Overall, the Czech EU presidency priorities reflected an internationalist orientation with an Atlanticist tinge that was characteristic of the ODS-Christian Democrat-Green

government in Prague (Drulák 2008: 23). However, the Czech presidency began amidst considerable doubt over whether Prague could handle the job, particularly in the midst of global economic crisis and with Europe facing the challenge of an increasingly assertive Russia. This doubt stemmed from the country's small size and its relative inexperience within the EU and on the global diplomatic stage. Also creating doubt, however, was Czech domestic politics and the fragile situation of the Topolánek government, which enjoyed only a narrow margin of support in the Chamber of Deputies and was bedeviled by sharp domestic disputes over ratification of the Lisbon treaty and US missile defense plans. On top of everything else, there was the uncomfortable presence of President Klaus, one of Europe's most outspoken Euroskeptics and a vocal opponent of the Lisbon treaty, as well as a prominent critic of efforts to combat global climate change. Despite his limited constitutional powers the unpredictable Czech president was nonetheless capable of embarrassing the Czech government and the EU, which in fact he succeeded in doing at times throughout the next several months.¹⁴ Klaus also played a key role in engineering the no-confidence vote that brought down the Topolánek government in late March, thereby undermining the Czech government's ability to conduct an effective EU presidency in its final months. Reflecting these doubts, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, whose country had just concluded a dynamic EU presidency in the second half of 2008, openly questioned the Czech government's capacity to lead the EU and suggested continued French leadership, on economic issues in particular, through Paris' chairmanship of the Eurogroup (the 16 EU countries using the Euro) (Euractiv 2008b; Traynor 2009a).

The Czech EU presidency also had the misfortune of beginning amidst twin international crises – as if the global economic crisis was not enough – that severely tested the Topolánek government's leadership skills while deflecting attention and effort from its stated priorities. In early January, the Israeli incursion into Gaza sparked international condemnation and outrage; simultaneously, another dispute between Russia and Ukraine over natural gas payments caused sharp drops in supplies to many EU countries. The initial Czech government response to these crises was inauspicious: a government spokesman excused the Israeli attacks as “defensive,” prompting criticism from other member states and a correction by Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg,¹⁵ while another dismissed the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute as a “bilateral” matter for the two governments to resolve themselves, despite its obvious impact on European consumers (Peel 2008: 3). Czech efforts to lead an EU response to the Gaza crisis were

also undercut by Sarkozy's separate diplomatic initiatives. Nevertheless, the Czech government soon regained its footing and made a credible effort to intermediate the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, with a final resolution occurring in late January. Soon afterwards, however, it had to endure further criticism from Sarkozy, who claimed that the Czech presidency was too passive and slow in its response to the economic crisis (Erlanger 2009).

Although at the time of writing the Czech EU presidency is not yet completed, it is possible to offer a mid-term assessment of what it has or has not been able to accomplish in terms of foreign policy. Regarding its first priority – Economy – the small size of the Czech economy meant that much of the initiative in dealing with the global economic crisis would come from the larger EU member states, especially Britain, Germany, and France. On the whole, the ODS-led government opposed large-scale stimulus spending and stricter regulation of financial markets as the best response to the crisis, arguing instead for more market liberalization (Topolánek 2009: 11). The Czech government was also a key voice against protectionist trends in the EU, most notably in its strong response to the French government's automotive industry rescue plan, which was accompanied by Sarkozy's calls for French automakers to repatriate jobs to France from lower-wage new member states such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It also joined with Poland to oppose a coordinated EU aid plan for troubled Central and Eastern European member states (Hungary, Romania, the Baltic states), claiming that such a regional approach failed to differentiate among the new member states and obscured the relatively healthy economic situation of the two countries (Euractiv 2009a).

The Czech EU presidency has achieved some progress on energy security, perhaps aided by the useful demonstration effect of the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis. In late March, as part of a broader EU stimulus package, the Czech government secured funding (€200 million) for the proposed Nabucco pipeline, which would provide an alternative route for Caspian basin energy that bypassed Russia, overcoming initial opposition from Germany (Euractiv 2009b). It also managed to achieve agreement between the Council, European Parliament, and Commission on the Commission's proposed third energy legislative package, aimed at liberalizing the internal market for gas and electricity and promoting greater solidarity among member states in the face of energy supply threats (Czech EU Presidency 2009b). It also scheduled for May 8 in Prague a "southern

corridor” summit involving discussions between the EU and representatives of the southern corridor countries.

Progress was also achieved on the external policy front, where the Czechs succeeded in gaining formal approval (and funding of €600 million) for the Eastern Partnership Initiative in late March, with plans to formally launch the initiative at a summit meeting in Prague on May 7. In the negotiations preceding approval of the initiative, the Czechs and likeminded governments successfully argued for the inclusion of Belarus in return for progress on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. However, an invitation to Belarus’ authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko, to attend the launch summit in May is jeopardized by the possibility that his government will submit to Russian pressure and formally recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two breakaway regions of Georgia that were occupied by Russian forces during the August 2008 conflict. The Czechs were also successful in bringing the Western Balkans back to the forefront of the EU’s agenda, including a push for visa-free travel to the EU for the countries of this region by the end of 2009. On the minus side, a unified EU approach to Russia failed to materialize during the Czech EU presidency.

Czech efforts to strengthen transatlantic relations were buoyed when the government succeeded in persuading President Obama to visit Prague for a US-EU summit in early April, following his previously scheduled visits to London for the G-20 summit and Strasbourg/Kehl for the NATO summit. However, Czech efforts to seize the initiative on US-EU relations were undercut by the collapse of the government just days before the president’s visit, as well as by Prime Minister Topolánek’s unfortunate description, in a speech to the European Parliament on March 25, of Obama’s economic stimulus plan as the “road to hell” (Traynor 2009b). Even before this point, however, relations between the US administration and the Czech government were strained by signals that the Obama administration was reconsidering US missile defense plans in Central Europe, which the Topolánek government supported and had invested much political capital in defending against substantial domestic opposition.

The Czech EU presidency also failed in its efforts to launch a major declaration on human rights on the occasion of the Prague summit. The text was prepared by former president Havel at the request by Deputy Prime Minister Vondra, Havel’s close friend from their pre-1989 dissident days and his former foreign policy advisor (1990-1992). In the document, Havel wrote that “the EU and USA are determined to thoroughly

monitor the present situation in China – among other [issues] also in relation to Tibet – the Russian Federation, Belarus, Burma, Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Sudan and in other countries where many free-thinking and honest people suffer for their views.” In the end, however, the government, which had already been voted out of office, did not have the strength or courage to convince its EU partners (many of whom are opposed to strong statements on Russia) to support the text. Havel had the opportunity to present his ideas to President Obama, however, with whom he met for a private conversation at the end of the summit (Nosálková 2009).

The collapse of the Topolánek government led to the April 6 agreement by the parliamentary parties to appoint a technocratic government – dominated by the ODS and ČSSD – that would govern through the end of the EU presidency (June 30) and until new parliamentary elections in the fall (probably 9-10 October). As a consequence, Czech foreign policy could also be affected. While the non-partisan head of the Czech Statistical Office, Jan Fischer, was nominated to be prime minister of the caretaker government, at the insistence of the Social Democratic leader Jiří Paroubek, Schwarzenberg was forced to resign as foreign minister and Social Democrat Jan Kohout, the deputy foreign minister and former Czech ambassador to the EU, was named as his replacement. The ČSSD also named a new deputy minister for European affairs, meaning that the Social Democrats would control the main foreign policy positions in the caretaker government outside of the prime minister, indicating a possible shift in Czech foreign policy priorities. However, the agreement on a technocratic government (to be confirmed by parliamentary vote in early May) also meant that President Klaus would have less opportunity to place his own imprint on the remaining days of the Czech EU presidency and Czech foreign policy.

CONCLUSIONS

EU integration has clearly had an impact on Czech foreign policy. As a condition of membership, the Czech Republic had to align itself with existing CFSP statements and positions even before accession. As a member state, the Czech Republic takes part in CFSP and ESDP deliberations (and operations), and it is expected to coordinate its foreign policy decision-making with other EU governments. Membership in the EU has involved the Czech Republic in a range of foreign policy issues in which it previously had little interest or engagement. It has also given a relatively small country enhanced possibilities for achieving its foreign policy goals through collective EU action.

Nevertheless, our survey of Czech foreign policy since 1989 does not provide much evidence that Czech foreign policy has been “Europeanized,” if by this we mean EU influence on the substance and orientation of Czech foreign policy. Indeed, while the EU provides a new supranational context and possibilities for Czech foreign policy, the EU influence on Czech foreign policy decision-making appears to be relatively small compared to domestic political factors. What has changed over time is not the level of EU influence, but the nature of the domestic factors influencing foreign policy. While in the initial years after the Velvet Revolution prominent individuals – especially the two Václavs, Havel and Klaus – exerted a strong influence on Czech foreign policy, since the late 1990s political parties and partisan politics seem to be playing a larger role. This may be due to the growing strength of political parties and the party system, but it also undoubtedly reflects the achievement of EU membership in 2004, which has lifted the constraints on foreign policy dissension and debate imposed by the overriding goal of EU membership. The impact of domestic politics on Czech foreign policy is also shown by the collapse of the Topolánek government in March 2009 – the outcome of political score-settling and partisan maneuvering in a still maturing political system – which undermined the Czech Republic’s ability to conduct an effective EU presidency and use it to achieve key foreign policy goals.

Moreover, despite EU membership the Czech Republic is still prone to make key foreign policy decisions outside of the EU framework, especially when these involve the United States and concern core foreign and security policy interests. This tendency is most notable in the case of the Czech government’s support for US policy on Iraq in early 2003 – although admittedly this episode took place before Czech accession to the EU, and before the EU had a formal position on the issue – and the government’s decision in 2006-2008 to negotiate unilaterally with the United States on the placement of missile defense facilities in the Czech Republic, without consulting with fellow EU member states. What these two instances indicate is that rather than a *reflexe communautaire*, when it comes to core foreign and security policy interests, Czech foreign policy is still more driven by a *reflexe atlantique*. Also reflecting a *reflexe atlantique* is the Czech Republic’s continued preference for NATO over ESDP as the foundation for European security and defense, although it also favors a strong EU security and defense identity within NATO.

In addition to NATO, the Czech Republic makes ample use of other international organizations and multilateral forums to promote its foreign policy interests, including

the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the UN. This is most evident in the Czech Republic's activism on international human rights, which successive governments have identified as a key foreign policy interest. However, the Czech promotion of human rights has not always been welcomed by other EU member states. In the case of Cuba, for instance, Czech criticisms of the Cuban regime have upset Spain, which claims for itself a special knowledge and expertise in Latin America. Czech criticisms of Russia for human rights violations and nondemocratic practices have also run up against the objections of other (mainly Western) European governments who are more reluctant to antagonize Moscow.

EU integration also does not appear to have significantly altered basic perceptions of Czech foreign policy interests. For the most part, these continue to be determined by (pre-1989) historical experience and perceptions of geopolitical vulnerability, which remain essentially unchanged even after attaining the goal of EU membership. On the other hand, since becoming a member state the Czech Republic has sought to use the EU to achieve its own foreign policy goals, as have other member states. Since joining the EU, the Czech Republic has pushed for EU action on each of its main foreign policy priorities, including the stabilization and integration of the Western Balkans, increased partnership with Eastern Europe, enhanced energy security, improved transatlantic relations and greater cooperation between the EU and NATO, the expansion of free trade, and the promotion of international human rights. All of these issues were designated priorities for the Czech EU presidency in the first half of 2009, which gave the Czech Republic its best opportunity to influence the EU's foreign policy agenda.

What explains or accounts for the limited Europeanization of Czech foreign policy? The most obvious explanation would be the limited amount of time which has passed since the Czech Republic joined the EU in May 2004, creating little opportunity for socialization within the EU framework to occur. While the process of alignment with EU foreign policy began well before accession, this was largely a rhetorical exercise with limited socialization effects. Moreover, the socialization which has occurred, in the pre-accession period and after accession, has affected mainly Czech government officials posted to Brussels or working within EU institutions, and has not penetrated deeply into the national bureaucracy or the political parties, to say nothing of public opinion. However, the experience of the EU presidency in early 2009 does appear to have been an invaluable learning experience for many ODS politicians, especially for some of its more Euroskeptical ministers.¹⁶ When it comes to the Czech preference for

NATO over ESDP, it may also be the case that key Czech security policy actors were already socialized within the structures of NATO, which the Czech Republic joined in 1999 (Khol 2004: 43). Thus, the prior socialization effects within NATO may be impeding or competing with the socialization process within EU institutions. EU socialization may also have been impeded by the relatively limited experience of Czech politicians and government officials with international organizations more generally – something which may account for the seemingly more rapid socialization of foreign policy decision-makers in other small countries (Austria, Sweden, and Finland) which joined the EU in 1995, having already accumulated considerable experience in international institutions and multilateral structures.

Another factor limiting Europeanization could be the Czech Republic's peculiar historical experience and geopolitical situation. As a relatively small country that has been repeatedly victimized in the past by larger powers, the Czech Republic finds comfort and protection within the EU. Nevertheless, it remains wary of big power domination, even within the democratic structures of the EU. It thus takes care to assert and protect its own interests, and it is especially sensitive to perceived infringements of its recently-regained sovereignty – as indicated by the sharp response of the Czech government to French criticism of its early support for US policy on Iraq. The experience of Soviet domination, and of the failure of Western European powers to defend Czech interests in the past, also help explain the Czech Republic's wariness towards Russia and the priority it attaches to NATO and strong transatlantic relations.

The limited Europeanization of Czech foreign policy is particularly evident in the relative weight accorded to Washington versus Europe on security issues. However, the passage of time and the pull of geography could alter this balance over the years in favor of Europe. According to one Czech foreign policy expert, "The importance of transatlantic links is often considerably overestimated [in the Czech Republic] as we will never play a key role in US strategic thinking. We will never be able to build a privileged relationship with anyone else [like the UK has with the US], we will never have to choose – Europe is our only option" (David Král, cited in Hughes 2003). A similar prediction is made by the Anglo-American historian, Tony Judt: "Geography will triumph over history. It will eventually matter more to the Eastern Europeans to be in the favor of Brussels [than the US], because day to day they will need Brussels" (Darnton 2004: A1). Indeed, some evidence that such rebalancing is already occurring may be provided by the repositioning of Czech policy on the Iraq war after February

2003 – to “precisely in the middle between the US and EU,” according to the Czech prime minister – and the strong domestic and partisan opposition to US missile defense plans after 2006.

It is also possible that over time EU membership will alter Czech perceptions of geopolitical vulnerability, as the experience of Soviet domination fades and ties to larger EU powers, especially Germany and France, improve. This will be even more the case if the EU is successful in developing common strategies to improve relations with Russia, stabilize and integrate its southeastern and eastern borderlands, enhance energy security, and build a credible European security and defense capacity.

In the final analysis, therefore, the increased socialization of Czech foreign and security policy actors within EU institutions, combined with a reconsideration of basic foreign policy interests as a consequence of the accumulated experience of EU membership, could indeed promote a gradual Europeanization of Czech foreign policy. This process is sure to take time, however, and will also be influenced by the extent to which Czech domestic politics and public opinion also become Europeanized.

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ENDNOTES

¹ On the role played by perceptions of vulnerability and weakness in determining a country's foreign policy preferences, especially its "choices for Europe," see Haughton (2008: 12-13).

² For further information on Czechoslovak foreign policy in the pre-1989 period, see Vykoukal, Litera and Tejchman (2000), Křen (2005), Service (2008), Judt (2008), Veselý (2001), Vondrová (1995-97), Kaplan (2004), Kaplan (2002), and Prokš (2001).

³ Public support for NATO membership in the Czech Republic was only slightly above 50 per cent in the period preceding the country's accession to the alliance (STEM 2003: 5).

⁴ The Commission's annual "Progress Reports" for the Czech Republic and the other 2004 entrants are available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/key-documents/index_archive_en.htm.

⁵ See Šedivý (1998), for the views of the foreign minister of the Tošovský government (January-June 1998) on the foreign policy priorities of the Czech Republic, including renewed engagement in international organizations, greater emphasis on the "European dimension" of Czech foreign policy, and reinvigorated central European regional cooperation. For the foreign policy priorities of the first ČSSD government (1998-2002), see MFA (1999). On the revival of Visegrad Group cooperation after 1997, see Dangerfield (2008: 643-7).

⁶ On Czech government activities in the UN, especially in the area of human rights, see the annual reports on Czech foreign policy issued by the MFA and posted on its official Web site at
http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/en/foreign_relations/reports_and_documents/reports_on_the_czech_foreign_policy/index.html. In all the annual reports since 1998 there has been a section dedicated to Czech foreign policy and human rights.

⁷ Initially a nuclear, biological, and chemical defense unit; and later a field hospital in Basra and a military police unit to train Iraqi forces.

⁸ In March 2003, 70 per cent of Czechs opposed the Iraq war (CVVM 2005). For a detailed analysis of the Czech position on the Iraq war, see Handl (2003); also Král and Pachta (2004).

⁹ On 17 March 2009, the Czech government decided to postpone ratification of the missile defense agreement, in part because of uncertainty about the Obama administration's commitment to the plan (CES 2009: 4).

¹⁰ On the security views of the 2002-2006 ČSSD-led government, see MFA (2003), especially pp. 8-9.

¹¹ According to a spring 2008 Eurobarometer poll, only 34 per cent of Czechs supported Turkey's EU membership, just slightly above the 31 per cent EU average.

¹² The Priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (June 2007-June 2008) are available on the Visegrad Group Web site: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php?folderID=942&articleID=9497&ctag=articlelist&iid=1>. On the role of the Visegrad Group in EU Eastern policy, see Kratochvíl (2007: 193).

¹³ In 2005, the Czech Republic depended on Russia for 71 per cent of its oil imports and 78 per cent of natural gas imports (Czech Statistical Office 2005; cited in Khol 2008: 97).

¹⁴ On 14 February, Klaus prompted Members of the European Parliament (MEP) to walk out in protest after he compared the EU to the Soviet Union in a speech (Chafin 2009). Klaus also refused to fly the EU flag over his official residence, the Prague castle, during the Czech EU presidency. Before the beginning of the Czech presidency, Klaus had an explosive meeting in Prague with MEP leaders, who were critical, among other things, of Klaus' controversial meeting with an Irish Euroskeptic leader, Declan Ganley, during a state visit to Ireland in November (Booker 2008).

¹⁵ On Czech Television, Schwarzenberg termed the statement a "mistake": "It was his mistake, everyone makes mistakes," said Schwarzenberg, in reference to the spokesman's remark (Czech Press Agency 2009).

¹⁶ According to Oldřich Vlasák, a Czech MEP from the ODS, "it often took an enormous effort to educate and socialize our fellow [ODS] ministers in EU affairs" (Interview conducted on 8 April 2009).