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Checking the Czech Role in the European Neighbourhood

Petr Kratochvíl, Elsa Tulmets
Institute of International Relations, Prague

1. The European Neighbourhood Policy – what does it consist of?

If a stranger were asked to choose the most ambitious of the current EU policies, he might pick the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): Not only does it bring forty-three countries together, EU members and non-members alike, but its main aims are so broad, and at times so contradictory, that one wonders how all of them could be reached: The Policy purportedly should provide stabilisation and democratisation; it should secure inclusion but avoid further enlargement; it should ensure differentiation, yet create “one ring of friends”. All this makes the ENP similar to a strange animal whose future evolution is shrouded from the observations of even the most penetrating analysts.

However, even in its current rather underdeveloped form the ENP can be subjected to scrutiny, thus yielding some interesting findings about its nature and its strengths and weaknesses all of which will undoubtedly define its future course. In this respect, the three defining features of the ENP, mentioned tentatively above, deserve more attention. Surprisingly perhaps, all three of them can be cast as pairs of dual opposites that compete for supremacy in the policy: enlargement vs. non-enlargement, differentiation vs. unification, and finally stabilisation vs. democratisation.

The first tension, between enlargement and non-enlargement, is undoubtedly a major problem underlying the entire policy. In fact, for a number of EU member states the policy's main aim is to provide outsiders with a viable alternative to full-fledged membership. Such an incentive remained unchallenged during the first years of the policy's existence. However, after the 2004 and 2007 enlargement rounds, the balance changed dramatically. Virtually all post-communist EU members went from being outsiders to the most adamant supporters of further enlargement overnight. In Poland, for instance, the Ukrainian membership, or – as it is fashionably labelled – the “European perspective” has become one of the priorities of foreign policy. But all other countries also have their shoo-ins, be it Moldavia for Romania, or the countries of the Western Balkans for the Czech Republic. The European Commission has also managed, rather skilfully, to avoid explicit statements supporting one interpretation or the other. The price to pay for this diplomatic stance, however, is the policy's ambiguity – a problem that will grow less and less acceptable for all those involved.

The second tension, between unification and differentiation, is reflected in the conviction of the policy authors to create one ring of EU friends, spanning from Morocco to Ukraine and

Russia. From the beginning the idea was seriously hampered because some countries fell out – for Russia, a special strategic partnership was clearly the preferred option; other countries like Libya, Syria, and Belarus are (albeit for different reasons) also de facto excluded from the policy. However, the biggest problem with the one-policy-fits-all approach is the almost insurmountable difference between the Eastern and Southern ENP partners. To start with, there is no doubt that Eastern partners are European, unlike the South. Also, most countries in the East have clearly spelled out their wish to become EU members, whereas the South does not have such ambitions. And while the Mediterranean Sea can be easily interpreted as a natural border to delineate where the EU expansion should stop, there is not such a border in the East. As a result, it will prove increasingly more difficult to explain, for instance, why Romania should be in and Moldova out.

Finally, stability is considered one of the three main focal points of the policy.¹ Yet stability, together with the notion of shared ownership, is often at odds with deep cutting political reforms and related efforts at democratisation in the neighbouring countries. Of course, it is quite understandable why the retreat from political conditionality is so fashionable today: Many believe that in the Southern partner countries, particularly where the incentive for reform is low, the previous approach proved rather counterproductive. However, at the same time it deprives the EU of a main instrument that could be used vis-à-vis countries like Belarus, i.e. linking EU aid to political reforms.

Having all these tensions in mind, this working paper focuses on the role of the new member states and particularly on the Czech Republic's (potential) contribution to the ENP. We start by discussing the origins and early evolution of the ENP, which we believe is necessary for understanding these countries' role in it. The next section is dedicated to the role played by the new member states, and especially the Visegrád Group. The following part analyses the strengths and deficiencies of the Czech Eastern Policy; and the final section lists some recommendations aiming at improving the quality of the Czech Eastern Policy in the framework of the ENP.

2. From the enlargement to “a ring of friends”

The ENP was born out of the framework of the European Union's Eastern enlargement. Thus it is not surprising that the enlargement served as a strong justification for the policy launch. When the official accession negotiations started in 1998, various political initiatives regarding Eastern Europe, which primarily came from the UK, Sweden, Poland and Germany, started to be drawn (a “proximity policy” and more generally the “Wider Europe” initiative).² These initiatives were addressed to the Eastern neighbours of the EU and they aimed to create a sub-regional policy analogical to the Northern Dimension or the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

But countries like France, Spain and Italy began to complain that too much attention and resources had already been given to the EU's Eastern neighbours and argued that the re-launching of the Barcelona process should take first priority. They also feared that the term “Wider Europe” could be confused with an accession perspective. To solve this stalemate, the Council of General Affairs asked the Commissioner, Chris Patten, and the Special Representative for the CFSP, Javier Solana, to prepare a common strategy for a cross-pillar policy. It resulted in a common letter where Patten and Solana differentiated between the various potential regions concerned by the strategy.³ Later, after including the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the countries of the Southern Caucasus, the “Wider Europe” initiative became the

¹ European Commission (2003a), *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, communication to the Council and the Parliament, 11/03/2003, COM (2003) 104 final; Prodi, R. (2002), “A Wider Europe. A Proximity policy as the key to Stability”, speech/02/619, Brussels, Dec. 2003.

² Common letter of Chris Patten/Anna Lindh of 2001, Jack Straw's Letter to the Spanish presidency, speeches from Polish ex-Foreign Minister, Cimoszewicz, Polish strategies on Wider Europe, and German-Polish strategies on ENP.

³ Patten, C., Solana, J., (2002), *Wider Europe*. Available on: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/0130163334_001_en.pdf>

“European Neighbourhood Policy”. To underline the policy’s importance, Javier Solana also included it in the European Security Strategy of 2003.⁴

But the Commission set the main policy design, which aimed to create a cross-pillar policy. Since the strategy developed for the enlargement was considered a true success at that time,⁵ it represented a fundamental source of inspiration for the launch of the “Wider Europe – New Neighbourhood” initiative.⁶ Therefore, the first documents to set the policy were strongly inspired by the experience of the enlargement.⁷ In the Commission’s propositions of 2003 and 2004, one clearly recognises similarities between the policy ideas and the philosophy of enlargement and those of the ENP (accession conditions/common values, partnership, differentiation, deconcentration, decentralisation, ownership, and participation). Various policy instruments of the last EU pre-accession strategy have also been adapted to the context of the neighbourhood policy: Programmes like cross-border-cooperation (CBC), Twinning, TAIEX and other programmes in the field of culture and education are now part of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) that replaced the TACIS and MEDA programmes in 2007.⁸ As the new member states have accumulated experience with the tools of enlargement, it is not surprising that they have tried to play a growing role in the launching of the ENP.

3. How the new members co-shaped the ENP

From the opening of accession negotiations in 1998 to the launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003-04, the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe – at that time still candidates – played a major role as they influenced certain aspects of the European agenda. In regard to the ENP, they did so with “older” member states like the United Kingdom, Sweden or Germany.⁹ Indeed, they are still very active in promoting closer cooperation with the ENP countries in the East and thus most of them support the current German ENP Plus strategy.¹⁰

Among the new member states, four categories of countries have emerged. First, Poland as a case *sui generis* has been the most vocal supporter of the Eastern dimension of the ENP. Polish proposals were showing Warsaw’s concerns for the absence of a systematic EU policy in Eastern Europe in general.¹¹ The Polish government issued a non-paper on the “Eastern Dimension” in 2003 and the Minister of Foreign Affairs W. Cimoszewicz gave some remarkable speeches on the question.¹² Although the idea of an “Eastern Dimension” was not brought to the EU level, many elements of the Polish proposition have been incorporated into the ENP. The proposition asked for an Eastern Policy similar to that of the Northern Dimension or the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It argued that relations with the Eastern neighbours should be differentiated, so as to develop bilateral relations and a national strategy that would take into consideration the context of each country. However, Russia was not included in this proposition

⁴ Solana, J. (2003), *European Security Strategy. A Secure Europe in a Better World*. Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003.

⁵ European Commission (2003), *Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 104 final, 11 March 2003.

⁶ Interviews at DG Enlargement, April 2004, and DG Relex, February 2006.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ More on this Tulmets, E. (2006), “Adapting the Experience of Enlargement to the Neighbourhood Policy: The ENP as a Substitute to Enlargement?”, in: Kratochvíl, P. (ed.), *The EU and its Neighbourhood: Policies, Problems, Priorities, Ústav mezinárodních vztahů*: Praha, pp. 16-34.

⁹ Interviews at DG Relex (ENP coordination), European Commission, 23 February 2006; at the Finnish and Estonian Permanent Representations to the EU, Brussels, 5 and 7 June 2006.

¹⁰ E.g. Duleba, A. (2007), “The EU’s Eastern Policy. Central European Contribution. In a Search for New Approach”, *Policy Paper*, (1), Research Centre of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, January 2007.

¹¹ See Buras, P., Pomorska, K. (2006), “Poland and the European Neighbourhood Policy”, *Foreign Policy in Dialogue*, 6 (19), 27 July 2006, pp. 34-43, [Hwww.deutsche-aussenpolitik.de](http://www.deutsche-aussenpolitik.de); Natorski, M. (2007) “Explaining Spanish and Polish Approaches to the European Neighbourhood Policy”, *European Political Economy Review*, (7), Summer, [Hwww.eper.org](http://www.eper.org).

¹² E.g. Cimoszewicz, W. (2003), “The Eastern Dimension of the European Union. The Polish View”, speech at the conference “The EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy”, Warsaw, 20 February 2003, [Hwww.msz.gov.pl](http://www.msz.gov.pl).

because contrary to the other Eastern countries “it does not aspire to membership”.¹³ The Polish proposal strongly relied on its experience from EU accession. Therefore, to improve cross-border cooperation and to adapt the Twinning instrument to the neighbourhood, it suggested that all elements which have been taken over by the new ENP strategy. On a more political note, however, Poland has also worked with countries like Germany, to shape the EU’s agenda regarding the relation with Ukraine before and after the Orange revolution at the end of 2004.¹⁴

Second, the Baltic states, mainly Lithuania and later on Estonia, were also involved in the defining of EU’s relations with its neighbours before the enlargement. Both Lithuanian and Estonian politicians insisted that it was necessary for the EU to support the processes of democratisation in Belarus and Ukraine, as well as in the Southern Caucasus, especially after the Rose Revolution in Georgia.¹⁵ Recently, the three Baltic States proposed the strategy of “three plus three” to “express solidarity towards the former small Soviet republics” of the Southern Caucasus, whose relations with Russia are still quite ambiguous.¹⁶

Third, the Visegrád Countries were also able to put some proposals on the table, but unfortunately their support for a unified approach has been of a wavering quality. As far as the Visegrád Countries are concerned, Slovakia is probably second only to Poland in the debates on the ENP, and it has also been supportive of an “Eastern Dimension” in the EU’s external relations. Since 2001, various conferences have been organised in Slovakia on the topic, and the government has also proposed some position papers on the subject.¹⁷ For Hungary, the protection of Hungarian minorities abroad, which was already a key priority during Hungary’s accession into the EU, now represents a motivation to get engaged in the ENP regarding the East. The Nyíregyháza Initiative, which started in October 2003 and is meant to enhance the cross-border cooperation with Ukraine, is considered “part of Hungary’s contribution to the EU’s neighbourhood policy”.¹⁸ The Initiative will promote intensive work contacts in the fields of education, environmental protection, student exchange programmes and the specified training of local municipality officials.

Fourth, as of recently, Romania and Bulgaria have become important players too. The enlargement of the EU to both Romania and Bulgaria has created “a new challenge for the enlarged Union, namely the Black Sea dimension”.¹⁹ The Bulgarian government also supports the development of stronger cooperation with the countries of the Southern Caucasus, and the Romanian government indicated that it is in favour of the EU’s ENP Plus strategy.²⁰ Romania also promotes closer cooperation with Moldova as a potential candidate for EU accession.

¹³ Cimoszewicz, W. (2004), “The Eastern Policy of the European Union”, speech at the Institute of Political and Social Sciences, Paris, *Materials and Documents*, 7/2004, July 2004, pp. 20-24.

¹⁴ Auswärtiges Amt/Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, *Die Rolle der EU mit 25 und mehr Mitgliedern im 21. Jahrhundert. Beiträge für eine neue Weltordnung. Gemeinsame deutsch-polnische Studien* (June 2001 – May 2003), Berlin/Warsaw, 2003. [Hhttps://www.auswaertigesamt.de/www/de/infoservice/download/pdf/eu/dt-pl-studie.pdf](https://www.auswaertigesamt.de/www/de/infoservice/download/pdf/eu/dt-pl-studie.pdf); Gromadzki, G. *et al*, (2005), *More than Neighbour – Proposal for the EU’s Future towards Ukraine*, Warsaw/Kyiv, Stefan Batory Foundation, International Renaissance Foundation.

¹⁵ Paulauskas, A. (2004) “Lithuania’s new foreign policy”, Speech by the acting president of the Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius University, 24 May 2004. [Hhttp://paulauskas.president.lt/en/pne.phtml?id=4995](http://paulauskas.president.lt/en/pne.phtml?id=4995)H.

¹⁶ Interview at the Estonian Permanent Representation to the EU, 7 June 2006, and at with the Deputy State Secretary at the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tallinn, 28 June 2006.

¹⁷ For example Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, K., Duleba, A., Póti, L., Votápek, V. (eds.) (2003), *Eastern Policy of the Enlarged European Union. Developing Relations with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. A Visegrád Perspective. Thinking about an Eastern Dimension*, Center for Eastern Studies, Warsaw / Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava.

¹⁸ Zupkó, G. (2004), “Hungary’s contribution to the EU New Neighbourhood policy”, speech at the conference “New Europe 2020: Visions and Strategies for Wider Europe”, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration, Turku, 27 August 2004. [Hhttp://www.tukkk.fi/pei/NewEurope/Zupko.pdf](http://www.tukkk.fi/pei/NewEurope/Zupko.pdf)H

¹⁹ Raik, K., Gromadzki, G. (2006), “Between activeness and influence. The contribution of new member states to EU policies towards the Eastern neighbours”, *Policy study* commissioned by the Open Estonia Foundation, Tallinn, September 2006. [Hhttp://www.upi-fja.fi/eng/institute/news/index.php?nid=33](http://www.upi-fja.fi/eng/institute/news/index.php?nid=33)H

²⁰ Chifu, I. (2006), “The Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. A Romanian Approach”, *Eurojournal.org*, October. [Hhttp://eurojournal.org/H](http://eurojournal.org/H)

4. Czech Eastern Policy

When speaking about the Czech position regarding the ENP, let it first be said that in the past, particularly in the 1990s, Eastern Europe was not a region in which the Czech Republic was particularly active. In the first years after the break-up of the Communist Bloc, Czechoslovak diplomacy took great pains to distance itself from the Eastern European space. It did so both rhetorically, with the “return to Europe” mantra of Czechoslovak foreign policy; and practically – by insisting on the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Simultaneously, Czechoslovakia negotiated the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country, which had been stationed there since 1968. After all these foreign policy aims were reached, Prague’s diplomats turned to the West and their eyes were fixed there for the remainder of the 1990’s.²¹

Three issues were particularly conducive in strengthening this Western orientation: First, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the break-up of Czechoslovakia, the country lost a common border with the territory and mutual contacts, including cultural, economic, and political, slumped. Second, Eastern Europe started to be depicted in Czech media and in the political discourse as poor, unstable and full of dangers, the only escape being Western integration organisations such as the European Union and NATO. This murky picture was first confirmed by the (failed) coup of 1991 and later through the bloody war in Chechnya, unleashed in 1994. Third and most importantly, Russia, the main representative of Eastern Europe, chose a very unwise strategy during its negotiations about the NATO enlargement. It did so by trying to surpass the candidate countries and by discussing the issue exclusively with the United States and other influential NATO members. The outcome was not only a sour period in Czech-Russian relations but also a shift from indifference to growing irritation and mistrust toward the East.²²

Hence, at the end of the decade, the Czech Republic secured most of its foreign policy aims (freeing itself from the remnants of the Soviet/Russian influence, entering NATO and preparing for EU membership), yet it did so at a price: Not only did Czech diplomacy lose its traditional ties to the Eastern countries, its public also marked a substantial increase in antipathy toward the East.²³

A change in this rather unfavourable situation commenced only after 2000, when the course of Russian foreign policy took a pragmatic turn after Putin’s rise to power. This was accompanied by a renewed interest in Russia by Central Europe. It looked as though Russia was finally willing to put up with the NATO enlargement and discuss other bilateral issues which had not been tackled for the greater part of the 1990s (such as Russian financial obligations towards the Czech Republic). Moreover, with the approaching EU enlargement, a number of new issues began to crop up (visa regime, bilateral trade, etc.).

The Czech Republic also felt compelled to react to the changing environment. Unfortunately, the Czech attitude to the East was still marred by three privative factors.

1. First of all, for Czech politicians the “East” quite often was synonymous with Russia. Hence, even when Poland and Hungary were busy weaving an intricate net of relations with their neighbouring countries, particularly Ukraine, the Czech Republic still saw the developments in the East through a Russo-centric prism.

²¹ For more on this see Kratochvíl, P. et al. (2006), Foreign Policy, Rhetorical Action and the Idea of Otherness: the Czech Republic and Russia. In: *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. Vol. 39, no. 4/2006, pp. 497-511.

²² Cf. Votápek, V. (2004), Česká východní politika (Czech Eastern Policy). In: Pick, O., Handl, V. (eds.) (2004), *Zahraniční politika České republiky 1993-2004: Úspěchy, problémy a perspektivy* (Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic 1993-2004, Successes, Problems, and Perspectives). Institute of International Relations, Prague, pp. 99–109.

²³ See the press release of the CVVM Vztah k jiným národům II, SÚ AV, 22 January 2007, [Hhttp://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100644s_ov70122.pdf](http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100644s_ov70122.pdf)

2. The second factor was related to the country's efforts to streamline all its policies in one aim – gaining a full-fledged EU membership as soon as possible. This meant that whenever two foreign policy options clashed, the one leading more directly to EU membership was almost invariably chosen. For instance, while Poland made clear that it did not support the introduction of a visa-regime for Ukraine, the Czech Republic, striving for early entrance into the Schengen Area, withdrew from the visa-free regime in 2000 and thus, undertook this step almost four years before their entry into the EU.

3. Third, Czech diplomacy has long seen the Balkans as its main priority area. Czech politicians of all stripes have continuously declared their support for Balkan countries such as Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro in their efforts to overcome the war legacy and to approach the European Union. Quite understandably, once the countries of the Western Balkans were marked as (potential future) candidates, the appeal of the ENP was further decreased.²⁴

Contrary to some of the newer EU member states, Czech involvement in shaping the ENP came about rather late. The real change in Czech foreign policy occurred only after its entry into the EU and specifically over the last two years. Since then, Czech diplomacy has started to actively shape the ENP, and by doing so it has reached three vitally important elements of its Eastern Policy – specialisation, geographical focus, and multilateral support. Indeed, this surge in activities, both generally in the ENP and specifically in the framework of the Visegrád Four, has come in high time: Once the Czech Republic assumes EU presidency in 2009, the Eastern dimension should become one of the proclaimed objectives of Prague diplomacy during its EU leadership period.

Regarding specialisation, the clear focus of the Czech Eastern Policy is democratisation and related human rights issues. The Czech Foreign Ministry, an institution with a very clear notion of what the Czech Eastern Policy should look like, has created a special department to deal with such issues like the transition to democracy in 2004. The switch to a more specialised agenda was paralleled by a precise definition of the geographic scope of Czech policy. The Czech bilateral foreign aid to the Eastern ENP countries has grown considerably over the last years, compared to what the Southern neighbours of the EU receive (see Table 1). The two main priority countries are Ukraine and Moldova, yet Belarus and Georgia are included as well and receive a large portion of the Czech aid policy for ENP countries. A number of measures corroborate this orientation: The Czech Republic often initiates EU debates on concrete steps regarding Belarus; it has also become an active player in the solution of the Transnistrian conflict in Moldova. In 2005 it became one of the few EU Member States to be diplomatically present in Chisinau.

²⁴ See Kratochvíl, P. & Braun, M. (2007), The Czech Republic (Country Report), EU-25/27 Watch, No. 4/2006, January, [Hhttp://www.eu-consent.net/library/EU25Watch/EU-25_27%20Watch%20No.%204.pdf](http://www.eu-consent.net/library/EU25Watch/EU-25_27%20Watch%20No.%204.pdf)H

Table 1: Czech assistance to the ENP countries and Russia (millions CZK, 1999-2005)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total 1999-2005
Algeria	-	0,0	3,5	0,7	3,7	0,4	4,7	13,0*
Armenia	0,0	1,9	19,3	24,4	3,7	4,0	12,1	65,4
Belarus	0,0	0,0	14,2	13,6	8,2	21,6	28,5	86,1
Georgia	0,0	0,0	24,1	32,3	15,2	34,8	15,8	122,2
Jordan	3,8	1,2	1,6	2,6	6,8	6,1	4,8	26,9
Lebanon	0,0	1,9	2,6	2,7	5,1	5,4	1,6	19,3
Moldova	0,3	0,0	35,2	44,6	45,7	28,0	16,2	170,0
Morocco	0,0	1,9	2,7	4,9	2,5	2,6	6,0	20,6
Palest. Adm. Areas	29,0	33,2	0,0	7,3	16,4	6,0	5,4	97,3
Russia	0,0	1,9	12,6	10,7	46,3	101,8	-	173,3**
Ukraine	22,1	23,9	74,0	70,3	30,2	117,7	110,7	448,9
Total	55,2***	65,9	189,8	214,4	183,8	328,4	205,8****	1243,0

Source: Own compilation from: Podrobné statistiky zahraniční rozvojové spolupráce ČR za roky 1999-2004 a 2000-2005 – OECD, <http://www.rozvojovestredisko.cz>.

* 2000-2005 only; ** 1999-2004 only; *** without Algeria; **** without Russia

Notes:

1) Total bilateral aid from the Czech Republic for 1999-2005: 7 509,85 Million CZK (share of ENP countries and Russia: 16,55%).

2) Total aid from the Czech Republic for 1999-2005 (bilateral and multilateral): 12 051,31 Million CZK (share of ENP countries and Russia: 10,3%).

3) The global foreign aid policy evolved from 0,032% in 1999 to 0,114% of the Czech GDP in 2005.

In forging a more systematic approach with Eastern Europe, several Czech NGOs have played an indispensable role. Although the main concerns of organisations like The People in Need (Člověk v tísni)²⁵ are of humanitarian nature, they have also been instrumental in showing that the Eastern Policy must be rooted in people-to-people contacts and stronger presence on the ground. Hence, the political aspects of their activities cannot be overlooked. This claim was further substantiated when the former Director of the People in Need Foundation Tomáš Pojar became the first Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is responsible, among other matters, also for “transition assistance”.

Perhaps the most important achievement has been the successful presentation of Czech proposals at the multilateral level in the EU. Czechs are active participants of the group of “like-minded” countries (together with some older Member States and almost all new ones) who aim to increase the relevance of the ENP for the whole EU. The Czech Republic scored yet another success in its cooperation with the other members of the Visegrád Four when Prague proposed a non-paper about the EU’s Eastern Policy, which was accepted (in its modified form) by the other three members of the grouping. Although it is still not public, this non-paper could become the long-needed baseline on which the Czech contribution to the ENP will be systematically built in the future.

A final confirmation of Eastern Europe’s growing relevance in Czech diplomacy has been its change of foreign policy priorities in recent years. While the neighbourhood policy was not listed as a priority of the Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic in the Years 2003-2006,²⁶ recent statements from the highest echelons of the Foreign Ministry have consistently ranked the ENP, and Eastern Europe in general, among the top priorities.²⁷

The growing importance of the neighbour countries and Eastern Europe is also reflected by the increase of trade turnover between the Czech Republic and these countries. Although the

²⁵ For more details on their activities related to human rights promotion and democratisation see People in Need, <http://clovekvitisi.cz/index2en.php?sid=404H>

²⁶ Koncepce zahraniční politiky České republiky na léta 2003-2006 (The Foreign Policy Conception of the Czech Republic in the Years 2003-2006). Approved by the Government of the Czech Republic on 3 March 2003, www.mzv.cz/servis/soubor.asp?id=4191

²⁷ See for instance Vondra, A. (2006), Česká zahraniční politika: tři principy, trojí směřování a tři témata (Czech Foreign Policy: Three Principles, Three Directions, Three Topics). *Mezinárodní politika*, No. 11/2006, pp. 17-19.

increase is distributed rather unevenly among the individual countries, it is clear that growth in trade with the countries of the East is substantially higher than in the case of the South. For instance, the turnover with Russia increased by 45 percent and with Ukraine by 126 percent (see Table 2). Although a large part of the increase is due to the rising price of energy resources, there is no doubt that the Czech Republic is gradually returning to the Eastern markets. At the same time, however, we should bear in mind that even with this surge in trade relations, Czech trade with the ENP partner countries and Russia still constitutes as a mere fraction of the overall Czech trade exchange (see Graph 1).

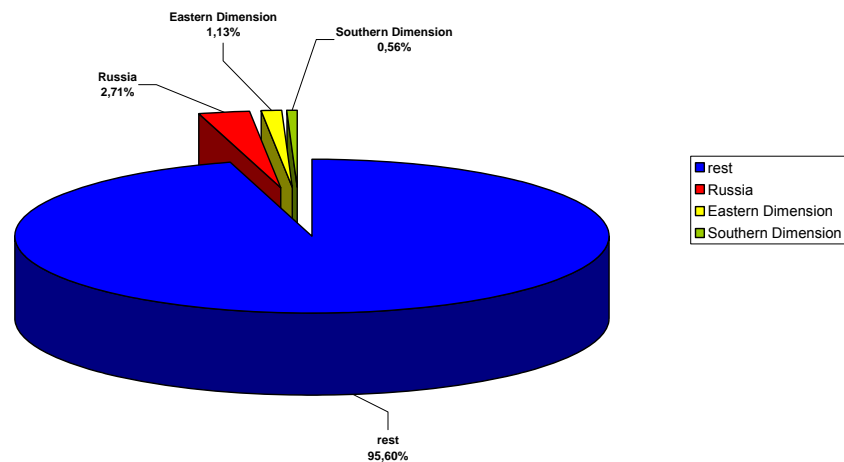
Table 2: The development of trade: Czech Republic - Russia and the ENP Countries (turnover for 2000-2005 in thousands CZK)

			2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Growth in %
Russia			95151395	94500917	76793494	82274512	95079761	138054438	45,08
ENP Countries	Eastern Dimension	Armenia	358276	194872	150104	126170	223965	N/A	-37,49
		Azerbaijan	681057	4718430	6179978	7333355	7831242	14906446	2088,72
		Belarus	5067095	3320405	2847606	3263443	3713308	3493865	-31,05
		Georgia	226607	217749	243588	414127	451611	N/A	99,29
		Moldova	469750	627935	401114	450407	1122651	N/A	138,99
		Ukraine	14732570	16815842	16347504	17123811	26385072	33347592	126,35
		Σ (Russia + ENP Eastern Dimension)	116686750	120396150	102963388	110985825	134807610	189802341	62,66
	Southern Dimension	Algeria	4571081	2974696	1961183	2596682	3023723	N/A	-33,85
		Egypt	2410980	2443037	2017441	1713240	2221692	N/A	-7,85
		Jordan	241820	462182	556140	394252	560961	N/A	131,97
		Israel	4512900	4784022	4323912	3761757	5414828	N/A	19,99
		Lebanon	1389289	1277701	1019317	919477	970130	N/A	-30,17
		Libya	149505	3842621	936628	1686292	1966340	N/A	1215,23
		Morocco	778950	884501	839659	906365	1419627	N/A	82,25
Palestinian Authority		0	36404	1991	2244	23010	N/A	23010,00	
Syria		890311	2023838	4835711	4819215	2782662	N/A	212,55	
Tunisia		579635	672900	975345	1204318	1184327	N/A	104,32	
Σ (ENP Southern Dimension)	15524471	19401902	17467327	18003842	19567300	N/A	26,04		
Σ			132211221	139798052	12040715	128989667	154374910	N/A	16,76

Sources: Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky (2003), Zpráva o zahraniční politice České republiky za období od ledna 2002 do prosince 2002. Praha; Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí České republiky (2005) Zpráva o zahraniční politice České republiky za období od ledna 2004 do prosince 2004. Praha; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (2006) Report on the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic between January 2005 and December 2005. Prague.

Explanatory Notes:

- 1) When the data in the sources differ, the most recent source was used.
- 2) Belarus - the turnover in absolute numbers for 2005 was calculated by converting the amount available in USD into CZK, according to the ratings of CNB for May 7, 2007.
- 3) The growth figures are sometimes incomplete as some data from 2005 are unavailable.

Graph 1 Share of Russia and the ENP countries in Czech overall trade turnover for 2004

Yet, despite recent accomplishments, a number of obstacles persist. The Czech public remains disinterested, and news from Eastern Europe is scarce and almost always related to crime, human rights violations, poverty, and other negatively perceived topics. As a result, the ENP remains a highly technical question and decision-making “rests in the hands of the bureaucratic elite”.²⁸ Moreover, even the expert debate is limited to just a few think-tanks (Association for International Affairs, Europeum Institute for European Policy, Prague Security Studies Institute, Institute of International Relations) and their activities are not always linked to issues discussed at a political level. A lack of coverage is also reflected in the political presentation of policies, which often end up with superficial statements about the need for stability in the European neighbourhood or, even worse, by confusing the ENP with other EU policies towards the Balkans, Turkey or Russia.

5. What role can the Czech Republic play in the ENP?

Support for the ENP Plus strategy

Czech diplomats are fully aware that their position is different from their counterparts in the other V4 countries. This is because the Czech Republic does not share a common border with any of the partner countries, and so issues related to cross-border cooperation, illegal migration and many others are perceived as less important. On the other hand, some issues remain high on the Czech diplomatic agenda: For instance, migration policy has become one of the priorities of the Czech national strategy, as Ukrainians represent one of the biggest and most visible foreign communities in the Czech Republic.²⁹ Similarly, human rights promotion has steadily been moved up in the pecking order of Czech foreign policy priorities. In other words, even though the Czech position is somewhat different from the other countries in the region, it still has strong interests

²⁸ Interview with a Czech diplomat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 7 February 2007.

²⁹ Ukrainians make up to one third of all foreigners working in the Czech Republic and their number is almost 90.000 persons. The official statistics, however, does not include illegal migration, which would certainly mean a further substantial increase. See Cizinci v ČR (Foreigners in the Czech Republic), Czech Statistical Office, http://www.czso.cz/ciz/cizinci.nsf/i/popis_aktualniho_vyvoje_pocet_cizincu_v_crH

vested in strengthening the ENP. This is also why the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially supports the German ENP Plus strategy.

Yet while the country generally agrees with the German proposals, one element of the ENP Plus causes some concerns – the energy policy. The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs hesitates here between the German and Polish positions: Warsaw is suspicious of German proposals because of the Russian-German oil pipeline, which has become a major irritant for Poland. Hence closer energy cooperation in the Black Sea Region, of which Germany is clearly supportive of, is not enthusiastically supported in Poland either. The Czech diplomacy that cooperates with both Poland and Germany on a number of issues tries not to take sides but in the long term it should be able to spell out its preferences. Although the Black Sea cooperation has a number of weaknesses, Czech diplomats are aware that it represents an important region for the transport of oil and gas from Central Asia. Because of this, the Czech Republic should support the Black Sea cooperation, which is one of the few examples of multilateral cooperation, in which several ENP partner countries cooperate on substantive issues.

Enhanced cooperation with the Visegrád Countries

Cooperation with other Visegrád Countries lost much of its drive after the EU enlargement of 2004. Today the Eastern Policy seems a hopeful candidate for replacing enlargement-related matters as the main vehicle of these countries foreign policy cooperation.³⁰ However, several issues put a question mark over the ability of the V4 to cooperate effectively in this area. First of all, all four countries are currently undergoing a highly tumultuous period in their domestic political arenas. As a result, their governments are hard pressed by the opposition and sometimes fall into extreme positions, which might be unacceptable for their V4 partners. Still, there have been attempts to find common ground; for instance, in 2001, the Swedish presidency invited the V4 to consultations about one EU strategy regarding Ukraine. A newer and more broadly conceived example was the abovementioned non-paper on the ENP. Nevertheless, the V4 still encounter difficulties in coordinating their foreign policies towards the East and their positions in the ENP. As one Czech diplomat bluntly stated, “there are issues where it is possible to agree, but others where it is not the case”.³¹

As a result, the Czech Republic should aim at cooperation in those areas where there is a clearly stated consensus among the V4 about the approach to the East. For instance, Prague could assume a leading role in promoting further softening of the visa regime towards the eastern neighbours. Although the entry into the Schengen Area undoubtedly remains a Czech priority, this should not mean that other issues should be entirely sidelined; especially, if the coordinated approach of the four countries could bring some results (A failed chance for such an approach was the recent acquiescence of Czech diplomacy to increase the visa fee for entering the Schengen Area to 60 Euro).

As the current window of opportunity is closing, because the ENP priorities will shortly switch to the South with the Portuguese EU presidency, the Czech Republic should secure the agreement of the other V4 countries in as many areas as possible before its own EU presidency in 2009. Indeed, after a row of countries with different foreign policy priorities (Portugal, Slovenia, and France), the Czech presidency will be the first to look to the East and so a substantial input to revitalise the ENP’s eastern dimension will be expected from Prague.

³⁰ For the potential contribution of the Czech diplomacy to the eastern reorientation of the V4 see Nekvapil, V., Berdych, A. a Veselý, L. (eds.) (2007), *Agenda for Czech Foreign Policy 2007*. Association for International Affairs, Prague.

³¹ Interview with a Czech diplomat, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prague, 7 February 2007.

More streamlining on the domestic front

However active the Czech Republic will be in the EU and vis-à-vis the other Visegrád Countries, the key prerequisite for a successful policy is a well-knit strategy toward the East, elaborated consensually on the domestic level. Although there are some signs that such a strategy is being born, a lot must still be done before it can have some impact on Czech foreign policy. First, individual policies towards Eastern Europe are not coordinated enough. To give just one example, the Czech focus on human rights is kept separate from the discussions on trade and investment policies. Thus, it is easy to criticise Belarus because its economic importance to the Czech Republic is negligible. However, criticism of Russia (be it Chechnya or the retreat from democracy) is always muted and allusive.

Second, institutional coordination of the policy is also extremely difficult. Although a number of central institutions deal with ENP partner countries, they seldom see their activities as part of the ENP. Consequently, the only institution really dealing with the ENP is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; however, even there the communication has to overcome substantial problems. In particular, the existence of several departments dealing with the ENP (including a territorial department, a department dealing with EU external policies, a department for development aid and the abovementioned department for transition assistance) makes it very difficult to streamline the Ministry's work.³²

Conclusion

Czech Eastern Policy has almost miraculously blossomed from an unloved and forgotten orphan into a handsome youth filled with energy. However, more is still needed for the policy to mature: Two key factors for improvement include the securing of better coordination at home, and attracting the interest of Czech politicians and the public. Only these steps will allow for further progress in the international arena. But even though Czech involvement in shaping the ENP came about quite late, the winds of change are blowing and Prague now tends to define its market niche in regard to the contents of its policy and its geographic focus. Yet, compared to other member states, Czech propositions remain rather timid thus far, and the ENP is still not visible enough in the government's foreign policy. Only a steady course and clear focus, which respects the views of its partner countries, will allow Czech diplomacy to make the ENP a pillar for its EU presidency in 2009.

*** *The opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.***

³² Cf. also Kratochvíl, P. (2007), Existuje česká východní politika? Od úprku z východní Evropy k opožděnému návratu (Does the Czech Eastern Policy exist? From the stampede from Eastern Europe to a belated return). *Mezinárodní politika* 4/2007.

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