

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS CZECH REPUBLIC - UKRAINE

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Abstract:

The paper My contribution deals with historical as well as current diplomatic relations between the Czech Republic and Ukraine. It is an analysis of certain historical, geographical social, economic, political and socio-cultural starting points of building international diplomatic relations. Ukraine is considered an essential and integral part of the Central European cultural space and is associated with the Czech Republic by a number of historical events. The main areas of discourse are the description of the development of mutual relations, the current state of international agreements between countries and the level of cooperation, and especially assistance to Ukraine, which has found itself in a state of war. These days, the Czech Republic is devoting the maximum possible support and assistance to the Ukrainian nation at the military, material, humanitarian, financial and social levels.

Key words: *diplomacy, Czech Republic, Ukraine, relations, agreements, cooperation*

1. Introduction

Diplomacy generally means cultivating contacts between different states and solving international problems. Diplomacy is the main instrument of national foreign policy and international politics. They are also called broader goals and strategies that govern the state's interaction with the rest of the world. Certain diplomatic negotiations then lead to the conclusion of international agreements and alliances for peace, economic, political, geographical, socio-cultural or other purposes.

Such a path is characterized as so-called „soft power“, as the ability to influence others to achieve the results we want through attraction rather than coercion or money.

Diplomacy is a means of communication between states. It serves mainly to resolve conflict situations peacefully, ie through negotiations and the resulting agreements and internationally legally binding treaties, etc. Diplomatic activity and diplomatic relations are conceivable both at the interstate level and within various international and supranational organizations. Examples are the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Public diplomacy as a part of the state's foreign policy began to gain importance especially during the Cold War. However, the concept of public diplomacy as such is not new. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, factors were identified that contributed to the growth of public diplomacy, based primarily on influencing public opinion (through the support of certain ideas and values). According to our approach, such factors include: the growing „circle of interests“ between nations, the dramatic impact of public opinion on diplomacy, and the communication revolution. The transformation processes after the end of the Cold War and the emergence of some new states can be considered as an example that recorded factors for the further development of public diplomacy. Transforming states became new members of the international community and their main goal was to present themselves as distinct, modern states (Nye, 2008).

Pamment (2013) describes the so-called „new public diplomacy“, which is mainly discussed at the beginning of the 21st century. He describes it as a major paradigm shift in international political communication. It means

that in the era of globalization and new media², foreign ministries and related structures can no longer play an exclusive or dominant role in formulating foreign policy. This is related to information flows and also to the fact that international relations and international politics involve more actors. Diplomacy must respond more and more to public debate and the lobby of interest groups, and at the same time it is influenced by them. This means that foreign policy should be communicated to a number of non-state actors, which also entails other ways to make this communication as effective as possible.

The Czech Republic and Ukraine are bound by geographical proximity, the post-totalitarian past ending with the fall of the so-called „Eastern Bloc“ in 1989. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and last but not least the historically close cultural relations. The Czech expatriate community in Ukraine and the significant Ukrainian minority in the Czech Republic cannot be overlooked. While the Czech Republic began to establish itself as a modern democratic state in the early 1990s, which had ambitions to move closer to Western European countries politically and economically, and which emphasized democratization transformation processes, respect for human rights, etc. Despite various efforts, Ukraine remained a country that he lays between the orientation towards Western Europe and the orientation towards Russia, with which he still maintains close relations and which has not only political but also cultural influence on Ukraine.

A very important step on the path to Ukraine's democracy in 2004 was the so-called “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine with the aim of an objective revision of the presidential election. In ten years, the so-called “Euromajdan” (there was a series of mass demonstrations in Ukraine lasting from November 2013 to February 2014), in which part of the population expressed their dissatisfaction with the direction of Ukrainian politics and the style it works. Through its political representation, Ukraine has been given the opportunity to make progress in democratization processes and integration efforts, especially vis-à-vis the European Union, which has been one of its priorities.

The Maidan protests of 2013-2014 a space for the collision of conflicting narratives about what Ukraine is and what it should be, and how the past, present and future have been used to imagine contemporary Ukraine. Using the speech acts of local and international actors and politicians about the Ukrainian crisis, historical narratives about Ukraine, protest slogans on the Maidan, and fieldwork data collected in 2013–2016 in Ukraine, we identify four meta-narratives that allow us to unravel such imaginings: (1) Ukraine as a border category between East and West; (2) Ukraine as Russia, Ukraine as non-Russia; (3) Ukraine as Europe, Ukraine as non-Europe; and (4) Ukraine as Ukraine (Musliu & Burlyuk, 2019).

2. Development of relationships

Czech-Ukrainian relations are primarily foreign relations between the Czech Republic and Ukraine, but they are also bilateral international relations between other Czech-Ukrainian actors (*inter-agency, international non-governmental organizations, other non-governmental groups, transnational corporations*) in international relations.

The destinies of Ukraine and the Czech Republic have been connected for centuries by a number of well-known and minor events, the migration of thousands of Czechs to today's Ukraine and Ukrainians, the work of artists, politicians, scientists and fallen Czechs and Ukrainians who fought common enemies several times in modern history. The following treatise attempts to approach the intensity and diversity of Czech-Ukrainian relations, especially at the end of the 19th and during the 20th century.

Thanks to the Ukrainian archaeologist of Czech origin Chvojko, we know that today's Ukrainian territory already had rich relations with Central Europe at the turn of the 4th and 3rd millennium BC during the so-called Tripoli culture. The ancestors of the Czechs came to the Bohemian Basin from the territory of today's Ukraine in the 6th century AD. A few decades later - around the middle of the 9th century - the Greek missionary Cyril worked on the shores of the Sea of Azov in the then Khazar state, who later, together with his brother Methodius, as part of their mission in Great Moravia, the foundation of today's Cyrillic (alphabet) and they promoted Old Slavonic as the language of worship. In the 9th to 11th centuries, the existing powerful Kievan Rus' had intensive relations with the Czech territory.

Mutual relations were alive even in later times - for example, the well-known Cossack governor of the first half

of the 18th century Pylyp Orlyk, whom Ukrainians consider the author of their first constitution, came from a Czech Catholic family that left Bohemia for Poland in the 15th century and then East.

In 1848, Czech and Ukrainian patriots met at the Slavonic Congress in Prague. During the First World War, Czechoslovak legions operated in the territory of the then Russian Empire and thus today's Ukraine. In the interwar period, Czechoslovakia became the center of Ukrainian political, scientific and literary emigration. Czechoslovakia officially recognized Ukraine on December 8, 1991. Diplomatic relations at the embassy level were established between the two states on January 1, 1993.

Ukraine, one of the largest European countries, is an important part of Czech foreign policy. Ukraine's position on the eastern borders of NATO and the European Union determines its place in the European security architecture. The Czech Republic sees the strengthening of independence and the development of prosperity in Ukraine as a contribution to the strengthening of security and stability in Central Europe. Integration into European structures is considered a strategic priority in Ukraine's foreign policy.

State building as an aspect of Ukraine's integration into the EU. Euromaidan had a profound but hardly acknowledged impact on EU-Ukraine relations, particularly in terms of the EU's subsequent support for domestic reforms in Ukraine. After Euromaidan, the EU supported Ukraine's aspirations to enter „economic integration and political association“ by concluding an association agreement – an agreement that was beyond the Ukrainian state's ability to implement. To increase this capacity, the EU supported the reform of public administration and provided extensive assistance in building capacity in government (Wolczuk, 2019). A number of authors are convinced that the partnership with the EU is strategic for Ukraine (Tsygankova, et al., 2020).

The broad involvement of Ukraine in European structures is a guarantee of maintaining this positive trend. The Czech Republic participates in the activities of partners from the V4 group immediately adjacent to Ukraine, the aim of which is to eliminate the unfavorable consequences of EU enlargement for Ukraine. The broad involvement of Ukraine in the integration processes in Europe is also beneficial to the building of civil society in the country and to the strengthening of human rights and civil liberties, without which it is impossible to rank among developed countries. Currently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic strongly condemns the decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the independence of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. This is a clear violation of the UN Charter, the Minsk Agreements and the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. Following the illegal occupation and annexation of Krym in 2014, this is another step by which the Russian Federation has long trampled on fundamental principles of international law.

Recognition of the independence of the so-called People's Republics is another step in the escalation of the already tense situation and threatens the security of the whole of Europe. The Czech Republic, together with allies in NATO and the EU, supports international diplomatic efforts to avert aggression against Ukraine and maintain peace. The Czech Republic will react with its allies in unity. We reaffirm our long-term, principled support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

3. Mutual agreements

The Ukrainian country has a long history of development Czech interstate relations have been dynamic. The legal framework of the agreements concluded between Ukraine and the Czechia includes more than 50 interstate documents governing foreign trade relations between the two countries. The most important agreements include the Agreement on Friendly Relations and Cooperation between Ukraine and the Czech Republic of April 26, 1995 (Lazhnik, et al., 2019). The contractual basis of relations between the Czech Republic and Ukraine also includes:

- Agreement on the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments
- Agreement on Trade and Economic Relations and Scientific and Technical Cooperation
- Agreement on Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters
- Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement
- Agreement on Cooperation in the Fight Against Organized Crime

- Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Nuclear Energy
- Air Carriage Agreement
- Agreement on International Road Transport
- Treaty on Legal Aid in Civil Matters
- Agreement between the Czech Republic and Ukraine on Social Security
- ...

Civil society in Ukraine has raised the issue of forming a national army driven by sovereignty and demands to perform military service exclusively on Ukrainian territory without involvement in conflicts in the Russian Federation (Seheda et al., 2021).

While helping the Ukrainians must be a priority, we must also think of students and colleagues in Russia who are against the war and are affected by the sanctions. As the Iron Curtain closes again, we need to think differently about our ongoing and future cooperation. Although freezing most, if not all, research collaborations with official Russian organizations is justified, it would be a mistake to extend these sanctions to all scientists and students. There is already an exodus of Russian and Belarusian scholars, which will only accelerate in the coming months and years, and accepting scientists who apply for political asylum will benefit Europe.

4. Cooperation

The date of 24 February 2022 marks not only the beginning of a new Russian invasion of Ukraine, but also the beginning of a new historical era. In our neighborhood, we see a range of horrors that we had no idea we could ever experience in Europe. Their driving force is Russia, which not only wants to deny Ukraine the right to a free existence, but also wants to restore the imperial spheres of its influence at the expense of international law and the security arrangements that underpin it.

During the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ukraine was supported by Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala and President Milos Zeman. To date, the Czech government has sent Ukraine ammunition worth 588 million crowns (more than 23 million euros). As of March 2, 2022, over a billion crowns were collected in public charitable collections for Ukraine.

On Sunday, February 27, 2022, an event in support of Ukraine took place on Wenceslas Square in Prague, which was attended by around 80,000 people according to police estimates. Prime Minister Petr Fiala, together with the prime ministers of Slovenia and Poland, visited Kyiv on March 15, 2022 and met with President Zelensky and other representatives of Ukraine. This previously classified trip was acknowledged with gratitude by the Ukrainian side and had a positive response in the Czech and foreign media. Already in August 2020, the Center for Humanitarian Aid of Ukraine was opened in Prague.

So we all found ourselves under threat from Russia, and not just the states that Russia considers its enemies. Life in peace, respect for civil and human rights, freedom and democracy have ceased to be taken for granted as a result of Russian aggression. This is something to be aware of! Russia's war is a war against the principles that form the core of our community. Therefore, brave Ukrainians are not only defending their homeland, but also the homeland and the values of all of us. This is why we must give them all our help. From accepting refugees (of which there are now 300,000 in the Czech Republic alone), through humanitarian aid to the supply of weapons, including heavy ones. The Czechia was one of the first countries to start providing all these forms of aid, and it is one of those that enforces the toughest possible sanctions against Russia. We are not guided by Russophobia, it is not our goal to escalate the situation. The goal is to effectively confront the ruthless evil that threatens us.

Historical experience also binds us to a fundamental position. We still remember the invasion of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia. Even then, the Kremlin claimed that it was coming to help the citizens of our country, even though it really only wanted to cut off their desire for freedom. Twenty years of totalitarian agony followed, from which we broke up only in 1989. Therefore, we can empathize with the natural effort of Ukrainians to live according to their own ideas, and not according to the wishes of the totalitarian power. At the same time, we see

that Ukrainians long for the same values that Czechs and Slovaks dreamed of in 1968, and which they could only fulfill thanks to the Velvet Revolution and, consequently, our membership in NATO and the EU.

This can be clearly seen on the example of Ukraine, which, despite all the obstacles and even dramatic events, seems to be the most determined partner in this regard. Among other things, the example of Ukraine has shown that the European values on which the EU itself is built (to some extent only declaratively) and which it also offers to the world are not empty words, even though it may seem so to many EU citizens. It also turns out that the concept of the EU's external activity, which offers not only values, but also very real opportunities for commercial, economic and political cooperation, is not only an attractive idea for partners, but also extremely unnerves those who the concept of human rights, democratic and market values they reject.

The Czech Republic supports the democratic transformation and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, both at the political level and concrete projects and initiatives. For example, Ukraine is a priority country for transformation cooperation of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also a target country of the International Visegrad Fund and the Czech Technical Cooperation Fund. In the years 2014–2018, the Czech Republic provided aid to Ukraine in an amount exceeding 13 million euros.

Within the framework of the current foreign development cooperation (DFC) strategy, Ukraine has the status of a so-called specific country - that is, a country that is not one of the priority countries of the FDC, but is given special attention and funding. Since 2014, development activities in Ukraine have been directed to the field of education and marginally also to the field of healthcare. Since 2014, Ukraine has also been a recipient of humanitarian aid, especially in connection with the armed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Development cooperation between the Czech Republic and Ukraine has been developing slowly since around 2005, when the Institute of Nuclear Research in Řež near Prague implemented a project aimed at increasing the safety of Ukrainian nuclear power plants. Since 2007, within the framework of so-called small local projects, the Czech Republic has started to support the development of sustainable tourism in Ukraine, first in the Transcarpathian region, and since 2011 also in Crimea. As part of the individual projects, hundreds of kilometers of hiking trails were marked out. In 2010, in cooperation with the State Committee for Forestry, a several-year project in the area of inventorying forest ecosystems and assessment of forest resources was completed.

In response to the events at the turn of 2013 and 2014, the Czech government decided on the need to provide Ukraine with special assistance in its restoration and democratic transformation. Existing activities were fundamentally expanded, first by resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 167/2014, then No. 401/2017. Thanks to this, 4 million Euros were allocated for specific development and transformation projects in the years 2014-2018. Together with other bilateral aid and contributions to international projects, the total Czech aid to Ukraine in the years 2014-2019 reached 10 million Euros. Since 2019, Ukraine has the status of a specific country of the ZSR. The priority area of cooperation is mainly the field of education, some activities are directed to the field of healthcare.

The number of refugees in Ukraine in the Czech Republic has officially exceeded 300,000. More precisely, this is the number of people to whom the Czech Republic granted temporary protection due to the local war. There are about three times more adult women than men, while women and children make up almost 85% of refugees.

5. Conclusion

The Czech Republic considers Ukraine to be part of the Central European cultural space, and our country has a number of historical ties. This is not the only reason why the Czechia supports the development of civil society, respect for human rights and freedoms and Ukraine's involvement in European structures.

The Czech Republic also pays constant attention to compatriots in Ukraine. Even with limited resources, we are also able to support several investment projects of expatriate associations. Not only among compatriots is interested in teaching the Czech language, which is provided by the Czech Center in Kiev. Although cultural diplomacy is not a priority, it is an important component of Czech foreign policy. The Czech Republic is relatively active in its relations with Ukraine, especially in view of traditional historical ties.

In the eyes of the civilized world, Russia has already lost the war. It is becoming increasingly isolated politically; economically, because sanctions take a huge toll; militarily, as the losses of the Russian army mount. In contrast, the courage of the Ukrainian people fighting for their independence has united the Western world, which provides enormous support to those Ukrainians fighting the Russian invasion and those who have fled their war-torn country. Once this war is over, Ukraine will need to heal the wounds of war, reunite families, rebuild its economy, rebuild its infrastructure, and rebuild science and education. Russia will have to restore its dignity and overcome self-inflicted isolation (Shcherbata, 2022).

Acknowledgements: At this point and on this occasion, I would like to thank the entire Ukrainian people and nation for the way they are managing the current situation in their country. Their determination, willingness, desire and steadfastness to defend their country against ruthless evil could be a model for other nations as well. Glory to Ukraine!

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