

Poland's Policy Regarding the Czech Republic

The admission of Poland and the Czech Republic into the European Union enlivened relations between the two countries. Their political cooperation in the EU, the rapid expansion of their economic ties, (including capital and investment ties of a strategic nature), the increase of trans-border contacts and the gradual rapprochement between the societies of the two countries turned the Czech Republic into one of Poland's most important partners within the European Union. The intensification of Polish-Czech relations was also influenced by plans to install elements of America's Missile Defence (MD) system in both countries. Thanks to both countries' similar political constellation, they were able to find a common denominator in their policy toward the United States, even though considerable differences in this sphere became visible in 2008. EU matters are a more important point of reference in Polish-Czech relations, however. The Czech Republic has become an important member of EU coalitions co-organized by Poland and was a close ally in the sphere of EU institutional reform.

Poland's policy toward the Czech Republic is also a significant aspect of the Polish foreign policy's regional dimension. Polish-Czech relations play an important role in the Visegrad Group (V4), whose chairmanship both countries held in 2008. Political cooperation within the Group is becoming an increasingly important European policy instrument for the four Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), and, to some degree, constitutes that policy's emanation. Within the V4, its members also pursue regional goals arising from the neighborly character of their relations. On this plane, too, cooperation in the Visegrad context complements bilateral Polish-Czech relations.

Background

For several years now, the growth of political cooperation between Poland and the Czech Republic has been favored by a similar profile of the political forces in power in both countries. In 2006, parliamentary elections in the Czech

* The author is deputy head of the Research Office at the Polish Institute of International Affairs.

Republic were won by the rightist Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana ODS), an outcome that signaled a turn from the country's affirmative policy with regard to EU integration toward a more skeptical stance that was closer to that represented by the right-wing Polish government at the time. The Czech Republic abandoned the equal-distance policy it had pursued until then with regard to Washington and Brussels and stressed stronger Atlantic ties and alliance with the U.S. An expression of this shift was an acceleration of talks with the Americans on the installation on Czech territory of elements of the anti-missile shield. The Czech right-wing declared that it was open to pursuing close cooperation with Poland and multilateral cooperation within the Visegrad framework. The concordance of both countries' position was increasingly evident during discussions about the European Neighborhood Policy in which the Czech Republic showed itself to be a staunch proponent of the "open door" policy and differentiated the EU's eastern from its southern neighbors. President Václav Klaus even singled out Poland as a high-priority country in Czech foreign policy, while emphasizing that he did not mean recognizing Poland's role as a leader in the region, but that "similar and publicly voiced views on a number of European and security issues strengthened the position of our two countries."¹

The Czech desire to work with Poland in large measure met the expectations of the Polish coalition government led by the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość PiS) party. According to then-Polish Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, closer cooperation with the Czech Republic was to be a factor contributing to the stability of the V4. Increased political cooperation was influenced by similar views on basic issues related to European integration and transatlantic relations. The Czech Republic became Poland's principal ally in work on EU institutional reform, something that was resisted vehemently by the Czech opposition, which was also against the Czech Republic's inclusion in the American missile defence system. Attitudes to this project in Prague highlighted the growing differences in views on foreign and security policy, also within the governing coalition. The radar and different approaches to EU institutional reform showed that there had been no consensus in the Czech Republic about basic foreign and European policy challenges for a long time.

Therefore, the rapprochement with Poland was to a certain degree due to the political situation, and that is why the Czechs were interested in seizing the opportunity to enhance bilateral relations with Poland, something that could also

¹ *Teze pro vystoupení prezidenta republiky na setkání s velvyslanci ČR, 30.5.2008, www.hrad.cz.*

be helpful during the Czech presidency of the EU during the first half of 2009. An expression of the desire to institutionalize the strategic partnership between the two countries was the Czech Republic's initiative of December 2007 to establish a Polish-Czech Forum as a dialogue platform for experts, academic circles, NGOs and individuals interested in both countries' cooperation.

In mid-2007, the Czech Republic assumed the year-long presidency of the V4, aiming to deepen cooperation and consolidate its mechanisms, especially in the EU framework.² These targets were also consistent with Polish declarations. Polish expectations were also met by Czech efforts to stimulate cooperation within the wider Visegrad Group formula (V4+), for instance with the Baltic states or Ukraine. The nature of the Group's work was clearly influenced by preparations for the Czech presidency of the EU Council. In January 2008, Prime Minister Topolánek stated that the Czech Republic would take into account "the agenda consulted within the framework of the Visegrad Group" in the projects of their presidency.³ In keeping with Poland's expectations are in preparing itself for the EU Council, the Czech Republic defined Eastern Europe as one of its three high-priority areas (in addition to transatlantic relations and the Western Balkans). It also announced efforts to give a clearer profile and to allocate adequate funds to the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy, while emphasizing the importance of democratization and other transformations in eastern neighborhood countries.⁴

Targets

Having come to power after the parliamentary elections of November 2007, the government of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk declared its willingness to continue Central European cooperation.⁵ During the December meeting of V4 prime ministers in the Czech Republic, Tusk gave assurances that Visegrad cooperation was a permanent aspect of Poland's foreign policy regardless of the political changes. While presenting the guidelines of Polish foreign policy in 2008, Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski mentioned Poland's traditional ties with the Czechs (in addition to those with the Hungarians and the Germans) and

² *Czech Republic Presidency of the Visegrad Group (June 2007–June 2008)*, www.visegradgroup.eu.

³ *Stenoprotokol 27. schůze, čtvrtek 31. ledna 2008*, www.psp.cz.

⁴ *Prioritní oblasti předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU v prvním pololetí roku 2009, říjen 2007*, www.vlada.cz.

⁵ *Przedstawienie przez prezesa Rady Ministrów programu działania Rady Ministrów z wnioskiem o udzielenie jej wotum zaufania, 23.11.2007 r.*, www.sejm.gov.pl.

referred to “Poland’s civilizational leap” under the Piast dynasty which rooted Poland firmly in the West a thousand years ago. Pointing to regional “anchoring” in the EU, he also stated that “Poland’s specialty” should remain “activeness in connection with the Eastern direction of EU foreign policy.” In this context, he stressed the need to cooperate in this area with Poland’s “nearest partners, with whom Poland has a shared past” Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians, and also the Romanians, Bulgarians and Swedes.

Thus the Czech Republic was still perceived as a significant Polish partner in the EU, even if Poland did not formulate any policy concept singling that country out from others in the region besides the partnership arising from potential participation in the American missile defence system. In practice, the Polish government was striving, both in its foreign and EU policy, to demonstrate a “new opening,” so an enhanced alliance with a country perceived as Euroskeptical and one that (just like Poland) had not completed the process of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty did not mesh with the strategy of shaping the image of a helpful partner to one of the largest EU countries. The formulation of Poland’s policy with regard to the Czech Republic was no doubt influenced by awareness that cooperation with the Czech Republic alone, even within the V4 framework, and with the Baltic states would not provide Poland with sufficient leverage to influence EU processes.

Poland placed a greater emphasis on developing the V4+ formula, which made possible the expansion of cooperation in specific areas to other partners and to arrange for regional cooperation, also with Romania and Bulgaria. Inevitably, relations with the Czech Republic and Lithuania, whose development was touted by the right-wing opposition as a great success of the previous government and the president, were no longer stressed to the same degree. President Kaczyński, who remained on very good terms with President Klaus, was a proponent of greatest “flexibility” in relations with the Czech Republic. The opposition, at times, called attention to Polish policy towards the Czech Republic, something that possibly had a positive effect on the growth of cooperation between the two states, as the Polish government, at least initially, showed no desire to give special importance to relations with the Czech Republic.

Political Relations

A number of highest-level bilateral meetings took place in 2008 and, along with a number of discussions held during various Visegrad meetings and other multilateral events, revealed the intensity of Polish-Czech political relations.

President Kaczyński was a guest in Prague in July, while President Klaus visited Poland in March and in October. In January, Prime Minister Tusk paid an official visit to Prague, whereas in October Minister Sikorski made an official trip there.

The subjects raised in January in Prague by the Polish prime minister included plans to establish a Center against Expulsions in Berlin (Prime Minister Topolánek supported Poland's opposition to this project).⁶ Discussions also included the Czech Republic's approaching EU presidency and energy security. The main topic discussed was the installation of the elements of the American missile defence system—the construction of an anti-rocket base in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic. Simultaneous discussions with the Americans about the installation of the shield's elements influenced the intensification of Polish-Czech relations. Both countries provided information about the negotiations underway, although they did not coordinate their activities —despite a declared striving for closer cooperation. While still in opposition, Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska—PO) criticized PiS for haste and submissiveness in negotiations with the Americans and accused the authorities of “following” the Czech path.⁷

The Czech Republic adopted a different negotiation tactic—it presented a more modest package of postulates and, during discussions with the USA, refrained from voicing differences in views and declared their willingness to come to an agreement. Initially, Poland noted that the negotiations “could not but succeed,” but abandoned such rhetoric after the elections. Although the two countries' negotiation strategies grew further apart, Prime Minister Tusk declared in December 2007 that Poland wished to coordinate discussions with the Czech Republic concerning the installation of the American anti-missile shield.⁸ During Prime Minister Tusk's visit to Prague on 10 January 2008, the two prime ministers announced that their countries would consult on “the greatest number of issues concerning the installation,” and their acceptance of the shield's elements would be dependent on the fulfillment of both countries' expectations.

⁶ Even though Poland and the Czech Republic conducted an intensive dialogue on the subject of historical issues with regard to relations with Germany, representatives of the Czech authorities tended to avoid commenting on the Center against Expulsions project. After the “Visible Sign” compromise concept, against which Poland did not protest, was made public in February 2008, historical questions in relations with Germany did not appear during high-level Polish-Czech governmental contacts. M. Kořan, “Visegrádská spolupráce, Rakousko, Polsko a Slovensko v české zahraniční politice,” in: M. Kořan *et al.*, *Česká zahraniční politika v roce 2008. Analýza ÚMV*, Prague, 2009, p. 123.

⁷ See, for example, “Po co nam tarcza antyrakietowa?” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 3 March 2007.

⁸ *Premier: Grupa Wyszehradzka powinna budować relacje ze wschodnimi sąsiadami UE, 10 grudnia 2007 r.*, www.kprm.gov.pl.

Prime Minister Tusk “met with the complete understanding” of the Czech prime minister and president of the conditions advanced by Poland for the installation of the shield’s elements.⁹ With progress made in Czech-American talks and an impasse in negotiations with Poland, the positions of the Polish and Czech governments visibly began to diverge. Poland attempted to obtain extensive technological and financial support from the USA for the modernization of its armed forces and strove to be granted a Patriot missile battery. For Poland, it was also much more important than for the Czechs to settle the matter of claims from third parties in connection with potential damages arising from the functioning of the shield.¹⁰ The Czech Republic concentrated on the inclusion of Czech industry and scientific research institutions in the development of the anti-missile system. An important, albeit not entirely intentional, result of the brittle coalition agreement in Prague was the Czech postulate of including certain elements of the American shield in discussions on NATO’s anti-missile system, so the Czechs stressed—much stronger than the Poles did—the allied dimension of the negotiations in addition to their bilateral dimension.

Initially, Czech politicians made the reservation that the agreement with the USA would be submitted to parliament once Poland’s agreement with the USA on the anti-missile base was a foregone conclusion. In the spring of 2008, the Czechs declared that they were ready to host the radar irrespective of the results of Poland’s negotiations with the USA. At the beginning of March, Prime Minister Topolánek criticized Poland’s position and questioned the sense of Poland’s postulates, while the Czech Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanová declared that Polish-American negotiations would most probably end in failure.¹¹ Cooperation with the Czech Republic was additionally complicated by American pronouncements about the possibility of operating the radar without the base in Poland. The former Polish prime minister, Jarosław Kaczyński, demanded concessions from the government and indicated that Poland was losing an important ally in the Czech Republic, while Czech opposition took advantage of Poland’s restraint in negotiations with the USA to criticize the Czech government.

Representatives of the Polish authorities viewed the conditions obtained by the Czechs negatively, and rejected the opposition’s demands to speed up talks

⁹ *Polska i Czechy chcą koordynować działania podczas negocjacji w sprawie tarczy antyrakietowej*, 10.01.2008, www.kprm.gov.pl; PAP, 10 January 2008.

¹⁰ *Informacja rządu na temat umieszczenia w Redzikowie elementów amerykańskiego systemu obrony przeciwrakietowej*, circular no. 1297, 6 November 2008, www.sejm.gov.pl.

¹¹ ČTK, 9 March 2008; ČTK, 10 March 2008.

with the Americans. Following the signing of the agreement with the USA, the Polish authorities indicated that construction of the system depended on the agreement's ratification by the Czech Republic. In the fall, Polish-Czech consultations were held at the level of deputy foreign ministers.¹² In November, the prime ministers of Poland and the Czech Republic also discussed Prime Minister Topolánek's political plan that was to lead to the ratification of the agreements in the Czech Republic. It entailed securing a parliamentary majority in favor of the radar in exchange for the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Minister Sikorski emphasized that "if there is no radar, there will also be no interceptor base in Poland."¹³ Ultimately, the Czech parliament failed to come to an understanding and the vote on the ratification of shield-related agreements was postponed until after the inauguration of President Barack Obama. All in all, the whole issue of missile defense contributed to a better understanding of the Polish-Czech community of interests in the Atlantic sphere.

Poland and the Czech Republic were also brought together by Moscow's threats in connection with the two countries' expected participation in the American missile defense system. Both governments viewed Russia's policy similarly. During the war in Georgia, they both condemned Russia's actions and, after military operations in the Caucasus had ceased, they found themselves in the group of EU countries that held the view that the EU should show no haste in resuming talks with Russia. Both governments strongly supported Georgia's aspirations to join NATO.¹⁴ Another expression of the two countries' collaboration during the Russian-Georgian war was the fact that Czech citizens were evacuated from Georgia on board a special Polish plane. Prior to its presidency of the EU Council, the Czech Republic warned against an excessively conciliatory stance with regard to Russia and criticized that country for its delimitation of a zone of privileged interests.¹⁵ After it had assumed the EU presidency, the Czech Republic toned down its criticism of Russian policy, however, seeing unanimity within the EU as a factor of key importance in the Union's relations with Russia.¹⁶

¹² *Česko-polské konzultace nejen k protiraketové obraně*, 24.09.2008, www.mzv.cz.

¹³ Debate on the government report on the installation in Redzikowo of elements of the American anti-missile defense system, 7 November 2008, www.sejm.gov.pl; "Radoslaw Sikorski: Americké základny tady budou," *Hospodářské noviny*, 18 November 2008.

¹⁴ *Mladá fronta Dnes*, 14 August 2008.

¹⁵ *Schwarzenberg: Rusko musí dodržovat pravidla*, ČTK, 27 December 2008.

¹⁶ *Prioritní oblasti předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU v prvním pololetí roku 2009*,

The Czech Republic and Poland held a similar view on the energy and climate package. Negotiations concerning this package were of fundamental importance for Poland. In May, Polish Deputy Prime Minister Waldemar Pawlak discussed energy policy and the energy and climate package with Czech politicians in Prague during the European Nuclear Energy Forum and the joint V4 and Baltic states summit.¹⁷ In September, Minister Cyril Svoboda came to Warsaw to discuss the energy and climate package, which was also taken up in talks between representatives of the Office of the Committee for European Integration and their Czech counterparts; in October, Czech Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Alexandr Vondra was in Poland on a working visit. The Czech Republic supported the Polish position and also supported the Polish motion for the European Commission to examine whether the package proposals would not have an unfavorable impact on the competitiveness of the European economy. Poland and the Czech Republic together stressed that the climate package was an opportunity for the EU's new members to collaborate.¹⁸ Although the Czechs agreed with the Poles and participated in the meetings of the coalition Warsaw had co-organized, in the end they did not join the position adopted by the other V4 members and by Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania and Bulgaria, a position that called for a balanced approach to combating climate change and efforts to ensure energy security. The absence of the Czechs' signature was a demonstration of their "neutrality" and readiness to assume the role as a moderator in the EU debate in connection with the approaching Czech presidency of the Union.¹⁹

The prospect of the Czech presidency gave rise in Poland to certain hopes that the debate about energy security within the EU would be enlivened. The Czech Republic was seen as a country that understood Poland's point of view on gas supplies better than other V4 members, although the scope of political cooperation in this sphere was nonetheless limited. The Czechs did not share all Polish fears, such as the one related to the North Stream pipeline, and saw benefits to be obtained from the transit of gas originating with this pipeline from Saxony to Bavaria through Czech territory. Poland placed great hope in the Czech support for the Nabucco gas pipeline and the Southern energy corridor. In 2008, conceptual work was undertaken on a pipeline link through Moravia that would in the future give Poland access to Central Asian gas supplied by the

¹⁷ *O polityce energetycznej w Pradze*, 29.05.2008, www.mg.gov.pl.

¹⁸ *Spotkanie wicepremiera Pawlaka z delegacją czeską*, 29.09.2008, <http://praha.trade.gov.pl>.

¹⁹ *Východ EU se bojí, že klimatický plán je vydá napospas Rusku*, ČTK, 26 September 2008.

Nabucco pipeline. The presence of PKN Orlen in the Czech Republic also led to greater Polish interest in southern routes of oil supply. Talks were held with the Iraqis in August on the possibility of supplying Iraqi oil to the refinery in Kralupy nad Vltavou through the port in Trieste.²⁰

One of the more important Polish foreign policy aims for 2008 was the creation of an institutional basis for the strengthening of the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy. The Czechs were a natural partner for the Poles in this area. As the country heading the V4, the Czech Republic pointed out that there was a need build “such a European neighborhood policy as would divide its funds and abilities justly between the Southern and Eastern dimensions.”²¹

Both countries took advantage of the V4+ framework to develop cooperation on behalf of the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy. Efforts to work out a common project in the V4+Sweden format proved unsuccessful, however, although the group, along with Sweden, had declared during a meeting in Prague that “further strengthening and deepening of cooperation with Eastern partners of the European Neighborhood Policy would bring additional benefits to the EU as a whole.”²² In April 2008, the Czechs presented proposals to strengthen the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy during a meeting of the Group for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST). These proposals were in large measure concordant with the Polish-Swedish concept, although they placed greater emphasis on multilateral cooperation and on a project-by-project approach. The Czechs did not signal the need to build distinct institutions within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy and did not single out Ukraine in any special manner.²³ When, however, Poland and Sweden presented their Eastern Partnership proposal in May, the Czechs gave it their clear support, which they confirmed at the June summit of the V4 in Prague.²⁴ The Czechs then participated in elaborating the Eastern Partnership project, which was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008.

²⁰ Waldemar Pawlak i Hussein Al-Shahristani o współpracy w sektorze naftowym, 22.08.2008, www.mg.gov.pl.

²¹ Summitu předsedů vlád zemí Visegrádské skupiny v Praze 16. června 200, www.vlada.cz.

²² Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Visegrad Group Countries, Sweden and Ukraine, 23 April 2008, Czech Republic, www.visegradgroup.eu.

²³ E. Ńulmets, “Český memorandum po vostochnomu sosvustvu,” *Evropa*, 2008, no. 2(27), pp. 63–74.

²⁴ Press Release: Official Summit of the Prime Ministers of Visegrad Group Countries, Prague, June 15–16, 2008, www.visegradgroup.eu.

Representatives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that their work with the Swedes on Eastern Partnership took into consideration earlier Czech views, as well as Prague's support during the approaching Czech presidency of the EU.²⁵ The Czechs were satisfied with this position and raised no official complaints for being left off the project by Poland. They participated in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership, treating this initiative as crowning their own efforts to strengthen the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy. Minister Sikorski stated that he was "particularly grateful to his Czech colleagues" that the Czech presidency accepted the Polish-Swedish program and that specific decisions about its realization were to be taken during the March European Council. Representatives of the Polish government, in rejecting opposition accusations of having "neglected the Czech Republic" during the first phase of preparations of the Eastern Partnership project, pointed to the fact that the success of the Polish-Czech initiative would allow the Czechs to organize the Eastern Partnership's inauguration summit.²⁶

Work on Eastern Partnership in the first months of 2008 showed that neither the Czech Republic nor other V4 countries were high priority partners for Poland in strengthening the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy, despite long lasting cooperation in this area, although Polish-Czech working contacts were intensified in 2008 in connection with both countries' chairmanship of the V4 and Czech preparations to assume the presidency of the EU. Bilateral working and expert consultations as well as consultations within the framework of the V4 became more dynamic. Intensive four-party contacts were developed by the permanent representations in Brussels. A wide range of issues were discussed as part of the Visegrad framework—the agenda of the COEST, COTRA (transatlantic relations), COASI (Asia and Oceania) work groups, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, economic and cohesion policies, problems of the internal market, coordination of various positions within the European Defense Agency and customs matters.

In the first months of 2008, interest in Czech preparations for EU presidency grew in Poland. In April, a delegation from the Office of the Committee for European Integration declared in Prague that Poland was prepared to intensify cooperation in EU matters. Poland supported the Czech presidency's aims expressed in the motto "Europe without barriers," including overcoming divisions

²⁵ *Biuletyn z posiedzenia: Komisji do spraw Unii Europejskiej (nr 97), Komisji Spraw Zagranicznych (nr 96), Nr 1905/VI kad. z 19 lutego 2009 r., p. 4, www.sejm.gov.pl.*

²⁶ See the debate on the foreign minister's report about the tasks of Polish foreign policy for 2009, 6 kadencja, 35 posiedzenie, 3 dzień (13-02-2009), 8 punkt porzadku dziennego, www.sejm.gov.pl.

between new and old EU members and striving to eliminate transition periods in the free movement of labor. During meetings in the V4, Poland took steps to “integrate the political programs” of the Czech presidency in the first half of 2009 with those of the Hungarian presidency in the first half of 2011 and the Polish presidency in the second half of 2011, especially in connection with the development of Eastern Partnership.²⁷ Poland was also interested in measures aimed at diversifying energy sources imported by the EU and lifting restrictions for workers from Poland and other new member states in their access to the EU labor market.

Poland was critical, however, of Czech views on excessive financing of the Common Agricultural Policy. The evolution of the Czech presidency’s program made these views recede into the background. The final form of the Czech presidency’s priorities suited Poland: the launch of Eastern Partnership was to be the yardstick by which the Czech presidency’s success would be measured, along with progress in the building of energy solidarity within the EU. Poland announced its strong support for the Czech Republic in eliminating red tape in European legislation and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. Voices questioning the competence of the Czech Republic to assume the responsibilities of the EU presidency, especially those originating from France, found no understanding in Poland.

Preparations for the Czech presidency and Polish support were also the subject of discussions held by Foreign Minister Sikorski during his November visit in Prague.²⁸ The Czech and Polish foreign ministers signed a memorandum about the calling of a Polish-Czech Forum, whose aim would be to stimulate the expansion and deepening of Polish-Czech relations.²⁹

A very good personal relationship between Polish President Kaczyński and Czech President Klaus was a significant element of Polish-Czech cooperation. In many areas, the two presidents held concordant views on EU matters, but their positions on the Lisbon Treaty differed. Insofar as President Klaus remains a staunch critic of the treaty, President Kaczyński, following his meeting with French President Sarkozy, promised that he would not block the adoption of the treaty. The war in Georgia revealed a clear difference between the two

²⁷ *Sekretarz Stanu w UKIE Mikołaj Dowgiałewicz, 6 kadencja, 28 posiedzenie, 2 dzień (06-11-2008), 15 punkt porządku dziennego, Informacja bieżąca, www.sejm.gov.pl.*

²⁸ *Wizyta Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych w Pradze, 14.11.2008, www.msz.gov.pl; Ministr Schwarzenberg přijal polského ministra zahraničí, 14.11.2008, www.mzv.cz.*

²⁹ *Memorandum of understanding, 14.11.2008, www.mzv.cz.*

presidents' views of Russia. Lech Kaczyński decidedly supported Georgia, warning Poland's EU partners against Russia's aggressive actions, whereas Klaus laid the responsibility for the conflict at Georgia's feet and stated that he saw no danger emanating from Russia. Despite this difference in views, the two presidents stressed the importance of deeper Polish-Czech cooperation, also on the international stage.

The October meeting between Presidents Kaczyński and Klaus was connected with the approaching 90th anniversary of both countries' independence. The visit of the two presidents to Cieszyn and to Český Těšín on the 79th anniversary of Poland's seizure of the Czechoslovakian part of the Cieszyn Silesia was to point symbolically to overcoming the historical burdens in relations between the two countries. "Together we are stronger and we can strengthen our position in Europe," Kaczyński observed, while Klaus emphasized that during his tenure he had not met with any other president as often as he had with President Kaczyński.³⁰

Controversies and disputes in Polish-Czech relations did not seriously threaten cooperation between the two countries and did not meet with any wider echo among the public. No progress was noted, however, in the resolution of the question of the so-called territorial debt, i.e. the necessity for the Czech Republic to return 368.44 ha to Poland.³¹ Initially, the Czech Republic proposed to settle the debt through financial compensation, but in 2007 agreed to hand over land. The Czech authorities undertook to prepare a list of land by the end of June 2008,³² but halted work in the face of fears had by local communities in border areas, explaining the move as a desire to avoid politicizing the problem before the elections.³³ Despite Polish pressure no progress was made in the matter, although the two largest Czech political parties: ODS (with the exception of a few deputies) and the Social Democratic Party, supported the settlement of debt by transferring land, in a belief that good relations with Poland should take priority over the objections of local authorities.³⁴

³⁰ *Wizyta Prezydenta Vaclava Klause w Warszawie, 13.10.2008*, www.prezydent.pl; *Polsko a ČR by měly stát v EU bok po boku, 12.10.2008*, www.euroskop.cz.

³¹ Pursuant to the provisions of the agreement between Poland and Czechoslovakia on the final delimitation of the state boundary of 13 June 1958, the border was "straightened" (shortened by 80 km): Poland handed over about 1,206 ha to the Czechs and received only 837 ha in return.

³² *Vláda chystá smlouvu o změně společných hranic s Polskem, 12. 9. 2007*, www.vlada.cz.

³³ "Czesi zwlekają z przesunięciem swojej granicy," *Dziennik Zachodni*, 13 October 2008.

³⁴ *České území Polsku? Velké strany problémy nemají, 31. 5. 2008*, www.aktualne.cz; M. Kořan, "Visegrádská spolupráce...", p. 124.

Economic Relations

The year 2008 was yet another consecutive year marking a visible increase in Polish-Czech trade, which has grown almost threefold since both countries joined the EU. In 2008, the Czech Republic moved from fifth to fourth place on the list of Poland's most important trade partners in the EU.³⁵ The Czech Republic is Poland's sixth largest trade partner worldwide (with a share of about 4.52% of Poland's total trade) and the largest in Visegrad Group. Poland is the Czech Republic's third largest trading partner (6.2% of total Czech trade) after Germany (28.7%) and Slovakia (7.4%).³⁶

In 2008 Polish-Czech trade amounted to €11.7 billion (an increase of over 18% from 2007). The Czech Republic responsible for 5.7% of Poland's exports (€6.63 billion) ranked in fifth place, while Czech imports to Poland reached 3.56% (€5.07 billion). According to the Central Statistical Office (GUS), Poland's balance of trade with the Czech Republic (positive in 2005) improved slightly in 2008 (from €1.47 to €1.5 billion).³⁷ According to Czech data, Poland's share in Czech exports increased from 5.9 to 6.5%, placing Poland in third place, after Germany (with 30.7%) and Slovakia (with 9.2%). Poland also held third place, after Germany and China, in Czech imports, where its share increased from 5.7% to 5.8%. The growth in trade slowed down in the second half of the year as a result of the international crisis and economic slowdown. Consequently, even though Czech foreign trade in 2008 (as expressed in Czech crowns at current prices) was almost unchanged from 2007, trade with Poland increased by 5.4%.³⁸ Polish-Czech trade produced good results in comparison to the two countries' trade with the majority of other EU partners.

Poland exports to the Czech Republic mainly copper, piston engines, parts and equipment for motor vehicles, coke, coal, energy, petroleum base oils, steel and metal products, tobacco products, furniture and aluminum. Highly processed products, especially electrical engineering, are increasingly important to Poland's exports to the Czech Republic.³⁹ Also important are clothing, footwear, furniture, household appliances, food processing and construction sector products.

³⁵ *Obroty handlu zagranicznego ogółem i według krajów (I – XII 2008 r. wyniki ostateczne)*, www.stat.gov.pl.

³⁶ *Zahraniční obchod 1–12/2008 – revidované údaje k 1.6.2009*, www.mpo.cz.

³⁷ *Obroty handlu zagranicznego ogółem...; cf. Zahraniční obchod s vybranými zeměmi v roce 2008 v mil. EUR (1.4.2009)*, www.czso.cz.

³⁸ *Zahraniční obchod 1–12/2008...; Zahraniční obchod s vybranými...*

³⁹ *Polsko-czeska współpraca gospodarcza*, <http://praha.trade.gov.pl>.

Poland's imports from the Czech Republic are dominated by passenger cars (Škoda), parts and equipment for motor vehicles, bituminous coal, chemical products, parts for television sets, flat rolled products, bars, shapes, iron and steel profiles, petroleum based oils, tires, electrical products, sanitary products and electronic equipment.

For several years Polish-Czech cooperation in the sphere of capital and finance has been growing dynamically. Cumulated investments made by Polish entities in the Czech Republic have exceeded €1 billion. The largest Polish investment in the Czech Republic was the take-over in 2005 of the Czech petroleum concern Unipetrol by PKN Orlen. Unipetrol is strategically important for the Czech economy and for this reason, the steps taken by the Polish investor are significant in terms of Polish-Czech economic and political cooperation. In the first half of 2008, a project to enlarge the refinery in Litvinov was confirmed and the main part of the restructuring of Unipetrol completed, with PKN Orlen depicting Unipetrol as "one of the most valuable parts of the group."⁴⁰ In the following months doubts emerged, however, as to PKN Orlen's intentions with regard to Unipetrol. The Czech authorities were seriously worried that PKN Orlen might sell its Czech assets, with the Russian Lukoil showing increasing interest.

According to Czech National Bank statistics, the value of Polish investments in the Czech Republic increased by €98 million in 2008.⁴¹ There were about 915 commercial entities in the Czech Republic with a 25% or higher share of Polish capital.⁴² Before 2008, the most important, besides PKN Orlen, were investments made by Asseco, which took over the PVT company and became a potentate of the Czech computer industry, and the purchase by Dwory Oświęcim of the Kaučuk Kralupy chemicals firm, resulting in the emergence of Europe's second largest maker of synthetic rubber (presently Synthos Group). Polish investments were also made in the automotive sector, retail sales and the food industry (such as the takeover by Maspex of Wolmark—the greatest producer of juices and beverages on the Czech market).⁴³ In 2008, Organika from Malbork took over the Gumotex-Břeclav company (production of polyurethane foam). Polish investors were also seriously interested in internet services. In May 2008, the financial group MCI Management purchased the largest Czech internet

⁴⁰ *Miliony złotych dla PKN Orlen*, IAR, 27 June 2008.

⁴¹ *Prímé zahraniční investice do ČR za rok 2008 v teritoriální struktuře*, www.cnb.cz.

⁴² *Czech Republic: przewodnik po rynku*, www.praha.trade.gov.pl.

⁴³ For more on the subject, see *Współpraca gospodarcza: Czechy, 01.04.2009*, www.mg.gov.pl.

travel agency Invia, and in November the Czech subsidiary of the Polish electronic bank mBank (part of BRE Bank SA) celebrated its first anniversary after having attracted 170,000 clients. In the fall, the Warsaw Stock Exchange made an offer to purchase the Prague exchange for €200 million, but the Vienna exchange was chosen instead.

The value of Czech investments in Poland amounts to about €600 million. The larger part of this sum was invested by the ČEZ concern, which took a majority stake in the Elcho (89%) and Skawina (75%) power plants in 2006 for about €390 million. In September 2008, ČEZ purchased the remaining 25% of Skawina from the State Treasury for PLN92.6 million (about €27 million). ČEZ announced plans to build two power plants (400 and 800 MW) and to take over heat and power plants in Zabrze and Bytom, as well as heating distribution networks in Upper Silesia.⁴⁴

The largest Czech investments in Poland include the Ostrava-based Tchas company's participation in the modernization of a section of the rail network between Siedlce and Terespol (€49.8 million) and in the modernization of the sewage network in Rybnik (€33 million). In 2008, a merger between the Czech company Kofola (which had built a beverage plant in Kutno for €20 million) and the Polish beverage producer Hoop was finalized, with 57% of shares remaining in Czech hands. In June, the CS Cargo Group took over TSL Unitrans—one of the leading logistical firms active in the south of Poland. The Slovak-Czech investment fund Penta—registered in Cyprus and the owner of the Žabka neighborhood stores chain (which has also been expanding in the Czech Republic since 2008), the Dr Max pharmacies and the virtual mobile phone operator Mobilking—continued its expansion on the Polish market. In October Penta purchased the company Okna Rąbień, an important supplier of windows and doors in Europe, and announced that it would invest a total of €1 billion. The Czech aircraft works Aero Vodochody (which belong to Penta) have made an offer to take over PZL Świdnik aviation company.

In 2008, decisions were taken that will allow for the development of Polish-Czech cooperation in mining and large-scale Czech investments in Poland. Following four years of preparations and negotiations, on 19 August a cooperation agreement was signed in Prague for the carrying out of geological work in border areas. According to the Czechs, the agreement is an expression of

⁴⁴ ČEZ koupí za 657 mil. Kč zbytek v polské firmě Elektrownia Skawina, ČTK, 16 September 2008; ČEZ plánuje v Polsku stavbu dvou nových elektráren, ČTK, 10 September 2008.

“strategic partnership in the energy and resources sector.”⁴⁵ The agreement will make it possible to protect the Czech mine from waters originating in the flooded Morcinek mine, and also will facilitate the preparation of a common exploitation of deposits by the Jastrzębska Spółka Węglowa and the NWR Group, which is controlled by Zdeněk Bakala, one of the richest Czechs. In June, the NWR subsidiary Karbonia PL was granted a 50-year license for mining coal from the deposits of the unused Dębieńsko mine in Czerwionka-Leszczyny. NWR announced that it will invest from €0.8 to €1.5 billion in the development of a new mine in this area.⁴⁶

Trans-border Cooperation

Trans-border cooperation grew dynamically in 2008, an important impulse here being the elimination of border controls pursuant to the Schengen accord. In the first weeks after the borders had been opened no significant problems were noted. Czech migration authorities became concerned when Austrian organs pointed to cases of refugees from Chechnya crossing the Czech Republic on their way from Poland to Austria. The problem was resolved diplomatically.⁴⁷ Measures were taken in the form of common border patrols by police, border guards and municipal guards to counter a slight rise in crime in the border areas. Several voivodeships (Opolskie Voivodeship with Moravian-Silesian Region; Śląskie Voivodeship with Moravian-Silesian Region, and Opolskie voivodeship with Olomouc Region) concluded agreements on mutual assistance, counteracting catastrophes, accidents, natural disasters and combating their effects.

In January 2008, Czech-Polish 2007–2013 Operational Trans-Border Cooperation Program was put into effect. Its aim is to support social and economic development of Polish and Czech border areas, to strengthen their competitiveness and cohesion and to promote cooperation among its inhabitants. The program involves six Polish sub-regions (those of Bielsko-Biała, Jelenia Góra, Nysa, Opole, Rybnik and Wałbrzych), two counties (Pszczyna and Strzelin) and five regions (kraj) of the Czech Republic. The possibility of obtaining EU funds has clearly stimulated cooperation of border area districts. For example, thanks to EU funds, which represent up to 85% of costs, the highway linking Hat

⁴⁵ *Umowa między Republiką Czeską a Rzeczpospolitą Polską, 18.08.2008*, www.mzv.cz/warsaw.

⁴⁶ *Odpowiedź podsekretarza stanu w Ministerstwie Gospodarki na interpelację nr 4505*, www.sejm.gov.pl; T. Głowacki, “Zdenek Bakala pokaże nam, jak zarabiać na kopalniach,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 May 2008.

⁴⁷ M. Kořan, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–123.

with Rudyszwałd was renovated and a project to protect the cleanliness of the border river Opawica was financed.⁴⁸ The “Transkarkonosze” Karkonosze Mountains Tourism Corridor is also planned thanks to EU subsidies.

The flow of workers is an increasingly important aspect of Polish-Czech relations, especially in trans-border areas. While the number of Poles employed in the Czech Republic has fallen by 3,000 as a result of the financial crisis, Poles still represent the third largest group of foreigners working there, after the Slovaks and Ukrainians. At the end of 2008, 20,680 Polish citizens were employed in the Czech Republic.⁴⁹ The first trans-border partnership within the framework of the European Employment Services (EURES) to arise on the territory of the new EU member states (and the 22nd in the EU as a whole) was established on the Polish-Czech border. In December 2007, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia signed the framework agreement, and on 12 March 2008, the European Commission gave its consent to the emergence of EURES-T Beskydy partnership which, on the Polish side of the border, includes border counties from Nysa to Żywiec.⁵⁰ The Work Group for Labor Migration and Social Insurance of the International Trans-Border Cooperation Commission also deals with trans-border issues.

In 2008, rail infrastructure linking the two countries was improved. After 63 years, the passenger rail connection between Jelenia Góra and Trutnov was restored. In November, the electrification of the Letohrad–Lichkov–Międzyzlesie rail line was completed, so fast trains will once again be able to run between Wrocław and Prague.

Poland has failed to live up to the 2004 Polish-Czech-German agreement on the construction of a trans-border road to link the German town of Zittau with the Czech Hrádek nad Nisou through the Polish district of Bogatynia. This investment project gave rise to controversy in Poland in the middle of the decade. It was argued that linking the Czech and German road networks through the so-called Zittau pouch would weaken the position of Polish seaports. Although the government did not negate the agreement and supported the strengthening of trans-border infrastructure, Poland did not begin work on the four-kilometer link. Given the transit role of that road, Poland obtained from Germany and the Czech Republic the sum of almost €15 million. As the call for

⁴⁸ M. Zator, *Efekty PO EWT na Dolnym Śląsku*, 02.12.2008, www.nowe-dotacje.pl.

⁴⁹ *Biuletyn Informacyjny, Wydział Promocji Handlu i Inwestycji Ambasady Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej w Pradze*, styczeń 2009, <http://praha.trade.gov.pl>.

⁵⁰ See www.eures-tbeskydy.eu.

tenders was delayed, the rise in prices and exchange fluctuations ate away at some of the funds and it turned out that there was a shortage of about €10 million. Neither the local authorities nor the Ministry of Infrastructure have found additional funds to finance the construction of the link.⁵¹

The collaboration of Polish and Czech local governments in favor of the Central European Transport Corridor (CETC), running through Western Poland, went beyond the scope of trans-border cooperation. The Polish Ministry of Infrastructure opted for raising the rank of this undertaking from the local to the central government level and proposed a schedule of measures leading to a meeting of transport ministers of CETC countries in 2009.

Social and Cultural Relations

Although some unfavorable aspects for Poland have been noted, overall trends in Polish-Czech social and cultural relations are positive.⁵² In Poland, Czech culture enjoys considerable popularity, while the presence of Polish culture in the Czech Republic is limited to connoisseurs. Czech media are interested in Polish political events more than cultural ones, although that is slowly changing. In 2008, there was less coverage of Polish internal politics, which had often been criticized fiercely under the previous government. In the commercial media, the presence of Polish culture was insignificant, but in public ones there were a growing number of reports from Poland and programs devoted to Polish culture and society. Books and films with subjects related to recent Polish history (such as Andrzej Wajda's film *Katyń*, books by Jan T. Gross, Father Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski and The Institute of National Remembrance historians) attracted considerable interest.

The Polish Institute in Prague plays an important role in the promotion of Polish culture. The commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the death of Ryszard Siwiec (self-immolation protest against the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968), organized by the Polish Institute, and the publication of Dorota Masłowska's book *Paw Królowej* (The Queen's Spew) attracted considerable attention. Great interest was also attracted by Krzysztof Penderecki (the premiere of *Paradise Lost* in Wrocław, and the Prague concert with the Sinfonia Varsovia orchestra) and Aga Zaryan (the principal guest of the prestigious "Jazz in Rudolfinum" concert), and also the events organized as part

⁵¹ *Odpowiedź podsekretarza stanu w Ministerstwie Infrastruktury na interpelację nr 6490, 17.12.2008, www.sejm.gov.pl.*

⁵² Fragment prepared with the help of a note by Maciej Ruczaj of the Polish Institute in Prague.

of the Warsaw Days in Prague. The involvement of Polish local governments in the promotion of Polish culture in the Czech Republic seems to be bringing positive effects. A traditionally important role in furthering cultural cooperation is played by Cieszyn and Český Těšín, where the Cinema on the Border film review and Without Borders theater festival are traditionally held. The 19th Polish-Czech Christian Culture Days were also held on the border. In Poland the organizer of cultural cooperation and promotion of Czech culture is the Czech Center in Warsaw. Such a role is also played by numerous partner cities and cultural institutions. In the view of the Czech Foreign Ministry, the most important cultural events in Poland in 2008 included the Czech Day in Warsaw, *Czeski Parnik*, a series of weekend concerts devoted to the Czech folk scene, the exhibition of stage sets from plays by Václav Havel and the November premiere of his play *Leaving* at the Ateneum Theater.⁵³

Polish art is often a source of inspiration for the Czech cultural scene. Almost all areas of Polish culture are present in the branch media (in this context, classical, jazz and electronic music should be singled out). Polish artists of both “high” culture (Polish contemporary classical music is particularly renowned), and “alternative” culture (new directions in music, performance and fine arts) have earned high praise. Polish artists, perceived as part of the European avant-garde, are increasingly often invited to the Czech Republic. The sphere of culture has become an important instrument of change for certain unfavorable aspects of Poland’s image in the Czech Republic. For this reason, the signing on 29 September 2008 by the two countries’ culture ministers of a program of intensified cultural cooperation for the years 2008–2010 should be seen as a positive prognosis.⁵⁴

An important role in the development of Polish-Czech cultural contacts is played by the Polish community concentrated in the Czech part of the Cieszyn Silesia Region. The role of this community as a player in Polish-Czech rapprochement is particularly significant at a time of dynamically expanding trans-border cooperation. The implementation of the provisions of the European charter of regional and minority languages has been significant for the national identity of Poles in the Czech Republic. In several dozen localities the possibility of using Polish at the local official level has been taken advantage of by, among other things, placing bilingual place name signs.

⁵³ *Česká zahraniční politika v roce 2008*, www.mzv.cz, p. 162.

⁵⁴ *Dziennik Ustaw*, 2009, no. 46, item 380.

Summary

The Czech Republic is playing an increasingly important role in Polish Central European policy. This is due not only to both countries' participation in the American missile defence system, but to their activeness in the EU and regional forums. Thanks to the rapprochement with the Czech Republic, the role of cooperation within the Visegrad Group has increased in Polish foreign policy. Initially, this had an impact on the Czech V4 presidency and, following Poland's assumption of that chairmanship in the middle of the year, on the prospect of the upcoming Czech presidency in the EU Council. The creation of the Polish-Czech Forum was a symbolic and practical step confirming the two countries' desire to reinforce their cooperation.

The Czech Republic has shown greater initiative in stimulating cooperation and expanding its mechanisms. Both countries are committed to political partnership and to dynamically growing economic relations in which, despite the crisis, positive trends can be observed. The two countries are very attractive to one other and there is great potential for cooperation, especially in the energy sector. Dynamically growing trans-border cooperation, particularly given the potential of Silesia, is increasingly important for both countries.

The Czech Republic is a close Polish ally within the EU, and also an important Atlantic partner. In terms of Poland's expectations formulated in connection with the Czech presidency of the EU, Poland's political relations with the Czech Republic can definitely be described as heading toward a higher plane: Poland showed solidarity with the aims of the Czech EU presidency, recognizing them as in large measure consistent with its expectations; most probably, during its own EU presidency, Poland will have to concentrate on similar priorities, such as energy, the EU's Eastern policy, single market issues, or countering crises. The two countries' cooperation during the period of the Czech presidency, the use of its experience, and collaboration with the Czech Republic (and other V4 partners) in preparing for and assuming the EU presidency in 2011, should further strengthen relations between the two countries.