

# Is Germany Acting as a Civilian Power in German-Czech Relations?<sup>1</sup>

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**Is Germany Acting as a Civilian Power in German-Czech Relations?** Bilateral German–Czech relations have been developing in a very specific, almost reserved manner, although the two countries are closely linked through EU and NATO membership. Despite the importance of their mutual cooperation within the EU, some discrepancies do appear in the course of their cooperation. As a consequence, this article identifies, on the one hand, the main disputed issues in German–Czech relations linked both with European policy, particularly with the issues of deepening and widening European integration, the refugee crisis and the Eurozone crisis, and with purely bilateral matters stemming from the context of the negative experiences of World War II. On the other hand, it attempts to answer the following primary research question: “In defined disputed areas of cooperation, is Germany acting as a civilian power toward the Czech Republic?”

**Key words:** European integration issues, refugee crisis, Eurozone crisis, questions of the past: German-Czech Declaration

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## 1. Introduction

Relations between Germany and Czechia have been developing in a very specific, almost reserved manner, despite the fact that the two countries are closely linked. The revolutionary year 1989 opened a new chapter in their relations, in which both countries

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pursued shared European goals: democracy, freedom, a market economy and the stabilisation of peace and prosperity in Europe (Gehring, Delinić and Zeller 2010: 34).

In the early 1990s, Czechia gradually established itself as a leading exponent of policy reform aimed at economic expansion and gradual transformation into a democracy ready to integrate into European and trans-Atlantic structures. Economic links, and the trade and economic benefits that resulted for both partners, became the precursor for strong bilateral cooperation between Czechia and Germany. In addition to close economic relations, the two partners also developed multiple initiatives, at many levels, including the national, non-governmental, regional (including border regions) and local levels, with the aim of overcoming historical obstacles and establishing a shared future course in the EU. Despite these efforts, largely implemented by German and Czech political leaders, civil society in both countries remained reticent in its evaluation of Czech-German bilateral cooperation. This reticence was primarily due to mutual indifference and persistent prejudices. In Germany, there was a lack of interest in cooperating with the country's eastern neighbours, including Czechia, which was seen as a small country without serious issues and without major points in common with Germany. From the point of view of the Czech population, meanwhile, the image of Germany continues to be bound by the past; the well-known stereotypes persist and since the Czech accession to the EU the perception of Germany has concentrated solely on neighbourly relations. There are two main views of Czechia in Germany: a more differentiated view in the immediately neighbouring federal states of Bavaria and Saxony, and a less differentiated view of Czechia as a former state of the Communist Eastern Bloc. Thus, Czechia is seen, on the one hand, by the older population through the prism of a Europe divided by the Iron Curtain, and, on the other, by younger people in the context of open European borders (Gehring, Delinić and Zeller 2010: 41–44).

Czech and German political leaders had shared interests in the integration of Czechia into the EU and NATO. It was in Germany's interest to secure the stability of Central European countries, as that would allow for closer and more effective collaboration in resolving problems in the Balkans. Integration policy was an indispensable part of Germany's foreign policy. Germany's support for the Czech Republic's integration into the EU was an important step in achieving reconciliation and dealing with the past, as was confirmed by the Czech-German Declaration, signed in 1995. Also playing an important role was integration into NATO, supported by Germany not just through the Partnership for Peace programme, but also with strong cooperation between German and Czech armed forces, undertaken on the basis of a memorandum agreed by the defence ministries of the two countries. This collaboration was implemented by direct contacts between the armed forces, joint military exercises, training and education (Skulínek and Dančák 2016: 21–22).

In evaluating German-Czech cooperation in the first years after the Czech Republic's independence and German re-unification, as well as subsequently during the

accession negotiations for the EU and NATO, and indeed since Czechia's integration into these organisations, multiple experts have described the development of bilateral Czech-German relations as reserved and ambivalent. The main reasons for such an assessment include the lack of preparedness on the part of both states to come to terms with negative historical experiences; in Prime Minister Václav Klaus's deprecatory view of Chancellor Helmut Kohl's vision of European unity and the social dimension of the market economy; and in European, or anti-European statements made by certain Czech politicians, which indirectly and negatively affected how Czechia was seen by German politicians. At the same time, the Christian tradition has played an important role in German political culture and its hierarchy of values, while lacking a major position in Czech political culture. On the basis of all this, Germany remained reticent in its foreign policy as concerned with Czechia, and tended to vacillate opportunistically (Kunštát 1998: 171).

Multiple authors have argued that Czech-German relations are characterised by two factors: (1) the asymmetry of their geopolitical, economic and demographic potentials and (2) the overcoming of the shared historical burdens (Fiala and Kadlecová 2016: 42; Handl 1993; Schulze-Wessel 2004). Stable and peaceful bilateral relations are asymmetric if there is clear, long-term, stable disparity between the abilities and possibilities of the states, but this disparity does not pose an existential risk for the weaker state (Wormack 2015: 13), in this case, Czechia.

As the weaker state, Czechia should focus on employing soft power in its relations with Germany, whose foreign policy is likewise soft-power oriented, in the context of the civilian power concept, emphasising multilateralism, multiculturalism, a preference for civilian-military operations and post-conflict and reconstruction operations, including development policy. At the same time, Germany adopts the role of the 'model economy', that is, it links the resources of economic prosperity with a high level of economic and social security. This role of the model economy was particularly employed to prevent general economic stagnation during the oil crisis in the late 1970s, as well as in 2008-2009 in response to the global financial and economic crisis. In connection with soft power, Czechia has focused in its collaboration with Germany on diplomatic resources in international organisations at the multilateral and regional levels, and especially sought to expand the traditional bilateral framework for relations between states by involving non-governmental actors such as civil society, experts and cultural leaders (Fiala and Kadlecová 2016: 45).

On the one hand, in Czech-German cooperation we can identify important breakthroughs, achieved either exclusively bilaterally in the area of the economy, in trade relations, in cross-border cooperation, and in mutual support for education, culture, science and research, innovation and technology; or multilaterally as part of the EU and NATO in the domains of defence, security, common market and human-rights protection (Gehring, Delinić and Zeller 2010: 44; Fiala and Kadlecová 2016: 41). On the other hand,

there are disputed points, stemming from negative facts that manifest themselves, likewise, either bilaterally or multilaterally.

The main aim of this article is therefore to identify the key disputed points in German-Czech relations, to analyse the behaviour patterns of both states and subsequently to establish whether in these cited problematic areas Germany acted according to the model of an ideal civilian power, or whether it used other available means to promote its national interests vis-à-vis the Czech Republic. In order to achieve these goals, this paper formulates following research questions:

The main research question:

1. Is Germany acting as an ideal civilian power in the German-Czech bilateral relations?

Partial research questions:

2. What are typical characteristics of civilian power behaviour?
3. What are the main disputed points in German-Czech bilateral relations?
4. What political strategy did Germany follow in these disputes? In which cases does it not correspond with a civilian power?
5. What other concepts does German political strategy tend to?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alternative concepts to explain German real behaviour in bilateral Czech relations are trade state, middle power and servant leader. Trade state is primarily oriented towards the affluence and prosperity of the country as a whole and especially its population, and this is prioritised in any foreign-policy disputes. It is in a trade state's interest to resolve any conflict peacefully and to cooperate internationally on creating and maintaining peace. According to Michael Staack, the main rationale for such actions and for such a state's interest in peaceful conflict resolution, in cooperation and in balancing the interests of various states through multilateral cooperation is the trade state's awareness that trade and prosperity can be most consistently developed in a peaceful international environment, regionally as well as globally, but particularly in a world economic system based on liberal values and principles (Staack 2013: 1).

Regarding middle power concept, many authors agree that a middle power is located between a great power and a small state; it has at its disposal certain power, both material and non-material, that is greater than that of a small state but smaller than that of a great power. In consequence of this a middle power is unable to influence international relations on its own. Its power is insufficient to do that; rather, what is expected is that it would be able to establish itself in a regional context, where it could act as a dominant power, determining the relations between the actors of the region. The relative power ranking of a state is important for the overall conceptualisation of a middle power: such a power adjusts its behaviour to the relative balance of power in the system (Gecelovsky 2009; Ungerer 2007; Cooper, Higgot and Nossal 1993; Cooper 2013).

The concept of "servant leadership" was originally developed by American businessman Robert Greenleaf in his essay 'The Servant as Leader', in which he studied the notion of leadership, especially as concerned with business. Later the concept was also applied to other areas, and took on a more comprehensive social character (Mangasarian and Techau 2017: 17). The concept is based on the fundamental idea of a leader, who is first of all the servant of the people and institute whose needs are first and foremost for the leader;

In terms of methodology, the article primarily proceeds on the basis of the Weber's ideal typology. An ideal type is a common mental construct in the social sciences derived from observable reality although not conforming to it in detail because of deliberate simplification and exaggeration. It is a constructed ideal used to approximate reality by selecting certain elements (Weber 1984, 1998). In this context ideal civilian power behaviour will be reconstructed in order to analyse in which cases and under which conditions real political behaviour of Germany diverse from ideal civilian power behaviour.

## **2. Ideal type of civilian power**

Civilian power represents a foreign policy role concept — as a complex block of norms, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions - which determinates behaviour both of a state and its decision makers. Civilian power is defined as a state willing to take initiatives and influence international and political affairs using specific strategies, means and instruments such as civilising of international relations, developing democratic society with perfectly civilised politics (Mauil 2000: 14).

Support for democratisation, good governance and the dissemination of democratic principles, universal values and sustainable development are to be considered as the main characteristics of an ideal civilian power (Kříž and Urbanovská 2014), i.e. national interests of such a power are interdependent. Authors Harnisch and Mauil describe the ideal type of civilian power as an initiator/promoter of multilateral co-operation, whose principal national aim is welfare maximisation and whose international aims are to promote supranational institutionalisation, its deepening and widening as well as the further development of international law and its enforcement. The policy style derives from collective action, compromise and mediation, preference for institutional solutions, as well as partnership and the collective enforcement of international norms (Harnisch and Mauil 2001).

The above mentioned characteristic is to be applied also from the military point of view. It is in the interests of such a power to cooperate with its partners in the military domain, not just regionally or bilaterally, but in particular multilaterally, within

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this then implies that the leader's primary aim is not to enlarge its own power and riches. The primary interest of the leader, then, is to ensure that the interests of others are met; not in an altruistic sense, but in the sense of the leader's absolute selflessness. By contrast, the servant leader is aware that its own interests are best served by supporting the interests and needs of others. Greenleaf argued that it is crucial where the leader's authority comes from, as this authority can only be recognised as long as the leader's intention to serve is truly discernible. This means that the servant leader is first of all a servant and only then a leader (Greenleaf 1991).

international organisations such as the UN, NATO and the EU. A civilian power is even willing to support the increase of its partners' military capacities in order to maintain peace and stability. Military power can only be used in accordance with international law, as a measure of last resort, if every possible diplomatic attempt to resolve a conflict has proven ineffectual. In terms of the economy, a civilian power supports efficient structures and the market economy, and makes use of the benefits created by free trade. Hence it is in its interests to seek closer integration, helping to liberalise trade and remove trade barriers between partners (Mauil 1999; Mauil 2000; Kříž 2007; Kříž and Urbanovská 2014).

In Mauil's view Germany has been representing an ideal type of civilian power because its foreign policy behaviour is in accordance with specific civilian power features; such as a willingness to take initiatives and assume responsibility for shaping events axiomatic multilateralism, support for deepening and widening international institutions, the promotion of the rule of law in international affairs and a willingness to transfer sovereignty and last but not least a value-based foreign policy which pursues certain norms even if its national interest do not benefit from the promotion of these norms (Mauil 2000: 16–17).

### **3. The main points of divergence in German-Czech relations**

Despite the fact Germany shall behave as an ideal civilian power in its relations with Czechia, several disputed points in their mutual cooperation are identified confirming discrepancy with the ideal type of civilian power.

Divergences between Germany and the Czech Republic result also from asymmetry in power resources and from power distribution, particularly from economic power. From the economic point of view the main factors to be compared in their relations are Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), and foreign trade (Table 1).

Regarding GDP as the first factor continual increase of the GDP is visible in 1994–2018. GDP increase in the Czech Republic was achieved after its integration in the EU which guaranteed economic situation improvement. However, there is an obvious difference in the GDP development between both states influencing their mutual foreign trade. Export and import data show that the Czech Republic is one of the foremost trade partners for Germany, in export in the 12th place and in import in the seventh place. For the Czech Republic Germany is the most important trade partner both in export and import terms, i. e. Germany is in the first place in the Czech foreign trade. These data confirm significant economic dependency of the Czech Republic on Germany which can lead to potential changes in German political behaviour towards its neighbour utilizing its economic potential and thus exerting political and economic pressure on the Czech

Republic not only at multilateral level in the decision processes about crucial economic EU issues but also at the bilateral level in the identified disputed points of their cooperation.

**Table 1.** Economic indicators

Indicators / States		Germany	Czech Republic
GDP bil. Eur	1994	2206	47
	2010	2819	207
	2017	3677	215
GCI Index	2004/2005	5.28 – 13.	4.55 – 40.
	2009/2010	5.37 – 7.	4.67 – 31.
	2014/2015	5.49 – 5.	4.53- 37.
	2017-2018	5.7 – 5.	4.8 – 31.
foreign trade – GE → CZ (2017)	export		41.6 bil. € (3.25%)
	import		46.46 bil. € (4.47%)
foreign trade – CZ → GE (2017)	export		53.5 bil. € (32%)
	import		32 bil. € (25.8%)

Source: GDP (2018a, 2018b), GCR (2013a, 2013b), Schwab et al. (2014: 13), GCI (2019), BWE (2019), CZSO (2018).

GCI index, analysing institutions, appropriate infrastructure, stable macroeconomic framework, good health and primary education, higher education and training, efficient goods markets, efficient labour markets, developed financial markets, ability to harness existing technology, market size—both domestic and international, production of new and different goods using the most sophisticated production processes and innovation, demonstrates differences between Germany and the Czechia which can influence comprehensive German image about the Czech Republic and its ability to maintain stable economic increase, to guarantee public prosperity and to provide domestic and international entrepreneurs proper conditions for development of their business plans. These economic disparities can affect German political behaviour towards the Czech Republic as it was mentioned above to behave not as an ideal civilian power but rather as a trading state pursuing national economic interests and developing economic cooperation granting welfare and economic prosperity for Germany.

The main hot issues in Czech-German cooperation are divided to divergences on the one hand at the multilateral European level, including divergent positions towards resolving the migration crisis and towards fundamental issues of the functioning of the EU. On the other hand, at the bilateral level, i.e. historical question concerned with the

expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, and the related problematic negotiations concerned with the Czech-German Declaration.

### **3.1. Multilateral divergences between Czechia and Germany concerning European integration**

The successful integration of the Czech Republic into the European Union opened a new phase of Czech foreign policy, which has not always been exclusively pro-European, and divided Czech political parties into four currents. The first current consisted of the “internationalists”: the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People’s Party (KDU–ČSL), the Green Party and the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), who supported closer integration and stronger trans-Atlantic relations. The second current of “Europeanists”, present on the left of the political spectrum and represented by members of ČSSD and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), prefers closer European integration over Euro-Atlantic relations, whereas the third current of the “Atlanticists”, represented by some leaders of the Civic Democratic party (ODS) and especially by the former prime minister, Václav Klaus, considers Czechia’s relations with the USA and UK as an absolute priority and rejects European integration beyond the framework of intergovernmental cooperation. The “Atlanticists” have established a Eurosceptic, or “Eurorealist”, profile that considers the EU an economic community that ought to function on the principle of intergovernmental cooperation between nation-states. The last, fourth, movement of the ‘autonomists’, led by a conservative wing within KSČM, rejects the EU and NATO, arguing that the EU is an instrument of large capitalist countries, especially Germany (Handl 2006: 53; Lang 2002).

This disunity on the Czech political scene has long influenced Czech foreign policy on the EU and fundamental European issues, creating several points of dispute between Germany and the Czech Republic concerned with the functioning of the EU, the position of nation-states, the future direction of the Union and recent issues such as Eurozone crisis and migration crisis.

#### ***3.1.1. European integration process***

The specificity of bilateral Czech-German relations is two-fold. First, the two countries take multiple divergent positions on European issues. Second, on those European issues where they share similar positions and find no other allies – for example, in agricultural policy – closer cooperation between the two eventually emerges. But in those cases where the Czech and German governments present the same position which is shared with other important European partners, the bilateral Czech-German aspect of their relations is not decisive, or is not the driver of further developments or solution of the issue in question (Belling 2016: 80).



Considering the disputed points of Czech-German relations in the context of European integration, it was the group of “Atlanticists” led by the former Czech prime minister and president, Václav Klaus, who proposed the most fundamental critique. Klaus presented contradictory positions towards Czech integration into the EU, and to the EU project as a whole. On the one hand, he argued that accession had more of a negative effect – of the Eurocrats – than a positive one (Handl 2006: 54). On the other, he pointed to the advantages stemming from membership in European structures – such as the opening of a large political and economic area and the implementation of parts of European law into Czech national law – which would improve the quality of Czech judiciary and law, and the liberalisation of the economy (Lang 2002: 9).

The option to participate in the European decision-making process does not play an important role for Czechia, Klaus argued, because ultimately it can only achieve what Germany will countenance. He considered Europeanism a new, dominant meta-ideology of the elites, a conglomeration of ideas that was heterogeneous in character, emphasising the model of a welfare state or social-market economy (Klaus 2006). Klaus rejected not just the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, but also the overall development of the European Union since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty. According to Klaus, it was desirable to adopt such a European Constitution that would strengthen the powers of nation-states, and the EU would act as a free association of European states. The autonomists, too, took a similar stance, promoting Czech interests in the EU; while the “internationalists” and “Europeanist” did not see the EU as an ordinary economic organisation, but as one that is significantly invested in its values, and within the framework of which the member states have equal opportunity to participate on political economic and social affairs. As the various currents differed in how they saw European integration, their stances towards Germany’s European policy were equally varied. The ODS believed that Germany’s aim was the “artificial” centralisation of the EU. All Czech political parties agreed that it was in Germany’s interests to support eastern EU enlargement and to support Central and Eastern European countries in the pre-accession negotiations (Handl 2006: 54).

Despite this, there have been cases where Germany has pursued purely its national interests, as in the introduction of a temporary period during which the citizens of new member states were excluded from the German labour market, and also in agricultural policy. As for the former, it needs noting that despite Czech criticisms and appeals to the German government to open the German labour market, ultimately the Czech labour force did not show much interest in working in Germany, and hence the question did not play a significant role in the bilateral German-Czech relations (Belling 2016: 81). Generally speaking Germany’s foreign policy is pro-European focused on intensive and effective cooperation with all EU members in significant areas in order to develop common policies and achieve common and sustainable goals in the EU integration issues (Deutscher Bundestag 2016).

The two countries' different positions were apparent during the negotiations of and subsequent voting on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. The Czech government not only presented its priorities, different from those of the German government, but also sought to win support for small- and medium-sized EU members, with the aim of creating a counterpoise to the large countries led by Germany. Czech political leaders considered German actions during the negotiations on the constitution as an attempt to assume a leading role in Europe (Handl 2006: 55). The Czech Republic also saw the negotiations of the Lisbon Treaty, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, as problematic. The country made its approval of the Lisbon Treaty conditional on obtaining an opt-out from the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. This Czech position was received in Germany with displeasure, and led to stagnation in mutual relations. The Czech Republic justified its rejection of the Charter by citing concerns that the Court of Justice of the European Union could legitimise the property claims made by Sudeten Germans against the Czech Republic. Thus, this argument brought back an unresolved issue of the past. Although German politicians were able to distinguish between the rhetoric and the positions of the Czech government (which was pro-European) on the one hand and the Czech president (the Eurosceptic Klaus) on the other, in the German media the Czech position was depicted as one, and presented a single image of the Czech Republic as an Eurosceptic ally of the United Kingdom and Poland (Belling 2016: 85–86).

The different conceptions have nonetheless never led the Czech side to a direct confrontation with Germany, as they have been aware of the potential threats to cooperation in the key policy areas which are of eminent importance to Czechia. Since the Czech Republic lacks a medium-term policy strategy on Europe, fundamental issues of European integration are not discussed by Czech and German political leaders. This means that where interests diverge, the closeness of cooperation between Czechia and Germany in the EU depends on whether the issue in question is part of their bilateral agenda. Whereas in areas such as environmental, social and labour policies there is strong bilateral cooperation, in defence, foreign and industrial policies there is not (Handl 2006: 56–57).

A common European foreign policy is the most problematic and polarising issue, not just for Czech-German relations but also for the whole Czech political spectrum. Czech "Atlanticists" rejected the creation of a European foreign affairs minister and European External Action Service (diplomatic service), as they thought these could ultimately weaken the nation-states. Since the aim of the "Atlanticists" is to support strong NATO cooperation, they are against joint European armed forces, which might replace the integrated NATO units. The "autonomists", by contrast, would prefer to abolish NATO; yet they also oppose the European defence policy, which might lead to a restriction of NATO activities, or even replace the pact. According to the autonomists, a stronger EU would act as a counterbalance to US influence. In 2002–2006, during the Convention on the Future

of Europe, they supported the creation of a European foreign affairs minister post and preferred an EU ready for action to a powerful NATO. In the Czech Republic, there has been a divergence not just among the various currents as outlined above, but also between the crucial ministries, defence and foreign affairs. The Czech defence ministry took an "Atlanticist" position, oriented towards strong cooperation in NATO, while the European section at the foreign affairs ministry saw Germany as the crucial partner in Europe and supported cooperation in the EU and the inner group of Germany, the United Kingdom, France (Handl 2006: 61). The German defence ministry has long adopted a similar posture, promoting the creation of a European defence union in terms of an "army of Europeans" (Weissbuch 2016).

Discussing common European defence, former Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka proclaimed that EU leaders were obliged to guarantee the security of European citizens. He also suggested that joint European armed forces might be created, and that they would ensure that the interests of European states would be protected. These European forces would not compete with NATO, but provide a more reliable partner for collaboration with NATO, one that would be more ready for action than before (Sobotka 2016). Sobotka's position on common European defence – armed forces included – was shared by the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, despite the fact that both politicians previously rejected any defence and security projects in the EU that would diminish the role of NATO in Europe. Experts evaluate their changed position as, on the one hand, a consequence of Brexit, which will transform security and defence cooperation in the EU, and as a consequence of the criticism to which Central European countries have been subjected over their refusal to accept refugees and failure to show sufficient solidarity in resolving the refugee crisis (Denková et al. 2016). Current Czech government declares that it is in the Czech interest to promote integration process, European cohesion and effective cooperation of all EU members in order to prevent increasing power of anti-European and anti-system political parties, however position of national states have to remain strong as well (Programové prohlášení vlády 2018).

Analysis of the first Czech – German divergence shows that Germany does not act as an ideal civilian power towards states that criticise or keep their distance from common European solutions. As a civilian power, focused on laissez-faire idea, free trade benefits, trade development with the Central European states, Germany should appeal on all EU states to be actively engaged in deepening and widening of the EU integration process, not only in economic and monetary policy, but also in institutional affairs and within common foreign and defence policy as well. Germany's primary aim is to safeguard the institutional and contractual pillars of European integration, including potential closer union, its stability and prosperous development. It is in Germany's interest to maintain a stable European Union, one that is ready to act globally, and united in the fundamental questions and directions. Czechia, supported by some other EU members, argues that European integration project is in reality a German project and Germany is

the only state taking advantage from EU integration both economically and politically. In this regard Germany tends to act in a role of a global actor or in Münkler's argumentation a role of a power in the middle, i.e. "Mittelmacht" (Record of interview 1; Münkler 2015) rather than in a role of an ideal civilian power.

### **3.1.2. Migration crisis**

The migration crisis is another point of dispute between Czechia and Germany (Germany also disagrees with Poland, Slovakia and Hungary on this issue). Like its other Central European counterparts, the Czech government claims that it is interested in promoting the principle of "effective solidarity", based on a readiness to participate in preparing strategies for effective and integrated development cooperation with countries of migration origin and transit, and consequently granting development and humanitarian aid to these countries. At the same time, they declare their readiness to improve the efficiency of bilateral and EU assistance for groups at risk in countries and regions threatened by conflict (Visegrad Group 2015). The primary areas of their engagement are the Balkan countries, protection of EU external borders, support for continuous and close dialogue with Turkey, and improving the efficiency of FRONTEX (Record of interview 2 2018).

In the official meetings of their political representatives at the highest level, the Czech and German sides have not been able to present a united position and both partners confirmed official statements of their countries. German president Steinmeier appealed to his Czech counterpart Zeman to the effect that all EU member states need to be aware of their commitment to respect the decisions of the European Court of Justice and of the commitment to solidarity not just with refugees, but also with their other European partners, who bear the brunt of the refugees (Steinmeier 2017). President Zeman, by contrast, argued that the Czech political scene was united on the issue of the refugees, and that aid was provided by other ways than by accepting refugees, namely in aid to construct power plants, hospitals, schools and drinking water supplies in the countries the refugees leave (Zeman 2017). Moreover, German Chancellor Merkel is convinced her decision to open Germany's doors to refugees in 2015 was right and humane and it was a reaction to an emergency situation (Bundeskanzlerin 2016). She argued that compulsory quotas present fair solution how to face with refugees as this crisis is to be solved as a common problem and jointly not as a problem of particular EU states (of south European states the most threatened or of Germany) (Bundeskanzlerin 2015).

Germany's behaviour in case of migration crisis does not confirm behaviour of an ideal civilian power. Rather the opposite: many experts and public opinion agree that Germany's soft power has failed, that the civilian power concept is not applicable (Record of interview 2 2018). In resolving the refugee crisis in particular, Germany acts as a middle power, as shown by its ambitions to push through a "willkommen" policy and compulsory

quotas at the European level. This German behaviour can be seen as a manifestation of unilateralism which diverges from civilian power concept. Some other experts argue that German behaviour is in accordance with a servant leader concept. German proposal to solve migration crisis presented a common European solution focused on more effective borders' control, burden sharing related to refugees accepting within the whole EU, common asylum policy, on the interest to fight against migration crisis reasons. Moreover, Germany showed its readiness to implement these goals, to serve as an example for other partners and not to be in a position of a leader. As a servant leader Germany does not serve its partners, but also demands cooperation from them, particularly it demands solidarity from the Central European states by implementing common refugee crisis solution (Mangasarian-Techau 2017).

### **3.1.3. Eurozone crisis**

Under the influence of the Eurozone crisis, there has been an increase in Euroscepticism among the Czechs, with growing mistrust not just of the euro but the EU as well. This Euroscepticism could have led to a dangerous scenario, should the Civic Democratic Party have scored another success after the 2010 elections. The party might have turned against the EU, and turned Euroscepticism into its ideological political programme. Such a scenario would have led to a change in how the Czech public and its political leaders act vis-à-vis the EU, and to a gradual marginalisation of Czechia in European integration (Handl 2012). The main differences between Germany and Czechia are notable directly in the question of the euro.

The Czech Republic does not show much willingness to adopt the common European currency, finding support in other EU members who have an opt-out from the Eurozone, such as the United Kingdom and Denmark. This means that the Czech Republic is not obliged to take part in Eurozone measures promoted by Germany, the European Central Bank (ECB) or the European Commission. The decision not to join the Eurozone might spell risks for the Czech Republic, in the sense that the decision-making mechanisms in the Eurozone are being strengthened, and the position of non-members weakened (Handl 2012).

In the Czech Republic, there has long been a problem of political disunity, not only across the political spectrum at large but also within the executive. During the government led by Prime Minister Petr Nečas, there were differences of opinion as to how the Eurozone crisis ought to be resolved, between Prime Minister Nečas, the foreign affairs minister, Karel Schwarzenberg, and the country's president, Klaus. The ODS, led by Nečas and Klaus, promoted a policy of isolating Czechia from the Eurozone, its legal instruments, the institutional aspects of integration and efforts at ever-closer union. Both politicians criticised the measures to increase the means of the International Monetary Fund, while the leaders of the coalition partner TOP09, and the opposition party ČSSD,

argued that the Czech Republic could not reject the EU plan to aid the Eurozone. The ODS also refused to participate in the Fiscal Compact. President Klaus said in this respect that the Eurozone was on course to fiscal and political union, or a federation, and that this was unacceptable to the ODS. Such developments, Klaus argued, would substantially increase economic costs, and would lead to negative economic and political developments in the Czech Republic. In consequence of this, the argument went, it was in the Czech Republic's interests to isolate itself politically and institutionally from the Eurozone and its problems, including such measures as the European Stability Mechanism, the Fiscal Compact, the Single Supervisory Mechanism and the Banking Union, promoted precisely by Germany. TOP 09, by contrast, defended Czech participation in the Fiscal Compact (Koncepte zahraniční politiky České republiky 2011; Beneš and Braun 2012). These domestic political disputes created a negative image of the country abroad, potentially threatening Czechia's relations with key European partners, Germany included. For this reason, Prime Minister Nečas assured Chancellor Merkel that the Czech Republic was aware of its obligations towards the EU, was interested in the stability of the euro, and would therefore act as a "shadow sigNATOrY" of the Fiscal Compact, with the option of joining the Compact in the future (Nečas 2011; Spiegel 2012).

Despite this, the role played by Germany in resolving the Eurozone crisis was not seen positively by Czech politicians. Czech Eurosceptics led by President Klaus accused Germany of hegemony and diktat, from an attempt peacefully to obtain clear European dominance, attempting to convert the EU into a "Fourth Reich" (Handl 2012). The ODS therefore emphasised the principle of intergovernmental cooperation in the EU, with a strong position for the nation states, hoping to eliminate the European initiatives pushed by the German-French tandem. Germany rejected such criticism; it did not match the profile of a hegemon, but rather took the role of a careful and reluctant actor, whose primary aim was to create an efficient strategy for saving and stabilising the euro. These were impossible without political instruments, such as the fiscal union and the ECB's bond-buying programme (Handl 2012).

On the issue of the Eurozone crisis, the German position was very specific, in that the country sought to act not as a leader, or a hegemon in resolving the crisis, but as a country aware of its economic might and influence in introducing measures to resolve the crisis (Hacker 2012: 14). To Germany it was important to find partners able to follow its proposals how to face the Eurozone crisis. The main proposals involved decrease of state expenses, social expenses, and enterprise subventions and set up of austerity mechanism. All this had to be accepted by all EU members not only by those of the Eurozone (Hock-Feig 2012). Chancellor Merkel had a keen interest in keeping the euro afloat, not just in the context of upholding the economic stability of the EU as a whole, but above all in the context of Germany's own economic interests and its export-oriented economy (Bundeskanzlerin 2013). Germany was willing to provide financial means to save Greece and the euro and to set up austerity mechanisms that EU member states had to adhere to

in order to save the euro, with the aim of maintaining a long-term balance in the Eurozone (Mangasarian and Techau 2017: 61–62). For that reason, Germany behaved as a “servant leader”.

### **3.2. Bilateral divergences - the legal groundwork of German-Czech cooperation and dealing with negative historical experience**

In the first years after German reunification and the end of the ideological conflict between the East and the West, there followed an era of reserved and relatively cool bilateral relations, due to the promotion of traditional national interests in a “realpolitik” sense, such as the minority issue or language policy (Pradetto and Alamir 1997: 54). Historical questions, connected with the issue of the expulsion of Sudeten Germans, came to the fore of relations most strongly. Despite the fact that this bilateral issue does not represent the core divergence in current Czech-German relations, its impact on complex Czech-German cooperation is obvious. Furthermore in this issue diversion from the civilian power behaviour is to be expected.

This issue and the discussion about the fundamental bilateral treaties between the Czech Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, namely the Treaty between the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Cooperation, and the German-Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development, presented the main point of contention in bilateral cooperation between Germany and Czechia.

The 1992 German-Czech Good Neighbourship and Friendly Cooperation treaty is the fundamental agreement that dealt with a broad spectrum of neighbourly issues, including recognition of territorial integrity and the setting of borders (Gehring, Delinić and Zeller 2010: 35), excluded any territorial demands, confirmed that the 1938 Munich Agreement was null and void and defined the rights of national minorities (Dauderstädt 2007: 427), but did not provide specific positions on the negative experiences of the past, reparations for the victims of the Nazi regime, or the question of the expulsion of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia. Since contradictory issues of property compensation for Czechs and the expulsion of Sudeten Germans were insufficiently clarified, more fundamental steps had to be taken towards their resolution. However, in the mid-1990s in politics and in society in both countries, there were tense and acrimonious discussions between political leaders, representatives of the Sudeten Germans and the population. From 1989, the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft demanded that the Beneš decrees be abolished and the expelled Sudeten Germans be given the right to a homeland. On the one hand, it derived moral and political support from the position taken by President Havel, who in 1989 for the first time in a personal proclamation apologised to the Sudeten Germans for the expulsion, for which he was criticised by Czech politicians and citizens. On the other hand, the Landsmannschaft gained strong political support from the

Bavarian CSU (Christian Social Union), which together with its sister party CDU (Christian Democratic Union) defended the interests of the Sudeten Germans in the Bundestag, and this had implications for the subsequent negotiations of the German-Czech Declaration. The pressures exerted by the CSU, as well as by the Sudeten Germans, on Chancellor Kohl mounted, in consequence of which the chancellor withdrew his proposal to compensate the Czech victims of Nazism. The situation became so tense that the Sudeten German associations demanded that legal steps be taken in cases where what had originally been property of Sudeten Germans was auctioned; they also wanted to have the expulsion recognised as an unlawful act and the Beneš decrees abolished.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the CSU demanded that the Czech side recognise the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft as an equal partner in the negotiations of the German-Czech Declaration. The Czech side refused, arguing that the only partner for negotiations was the federal government. Despite his rigid stance, the Bavarian prime minister Edmund Stoiber eventually joined the negotiations of the final declaration of the German-Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development, which was signed on 21 January 1997 by Prime Minister Klaus and Chancellor Kohl (Valenta 2017: 33–36).

The primary aim of the German-Czech Declaration was to strengthen bilateral cooperation and clearly to formulate regret of the occupation and subsequent devastation of Czechoslovakia, as well as of the post-war expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. Although the Declaration was a successful development in Czech-German relations, it needs noting that Chancellor Kohl was unable fully to pursue its aims in the Bundestag or indeed in German society broadly, in consequence of his claim that “despite the Declaration, certain matters remain open”, creating disappointment among the Czechs. The opportunity to deal with the past consistently was not taken up by either the Czech or the German side (Cordell and Wolff 2005: 157).

It is true that while negotiating the German-Czech Declaration, the two sides claimed to have a shared goal: that is, to jettison the burden of the past, and declared a political aim not to return to this past, yet their starting positions were different. The German side was not ready for the expected legal and political termination of the dispute without the Czech side showing a willingness to reflect upon the events connected with the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia. The more explicitly the Czech reflection

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<sup>4</sup> The Beneš decrees are a set of 143 acts adopted by Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš in 1940 and 1945, concerned with the restoration of Czechoslovak borders as they were before the Munich Agreement, confiscation of property and punishment of collaborationists with the Nazis of Hungarian and German nationality, the creation of special courts of law, the revocation of Czechoslovak citizenship of those people who during the period when the country had been under occupation claimed Hungarian or German nationality, and last but not least the expulsion of people of Hungarian and German national minorities (Ruttkayová 2007).



and self-criticism was expressed, the more concrete and politically serious the legal and political termination of the issue became. In Article IV of the Declaration, the two countries agreed not to encumber their relations with the political and legal questions of the past, but to remain tied by their legal systems and respect the different views of each other. The Czech side relied precisely on this article, whereas the German side relativized it. Under the influence of the negotiations of the Declaration, Germany came to “admit its guilt” and officially noted a causal nexus between the events of 1938–1939 and 1945–1946. In consequence of this step, there was a major critical self-reflection on the Czech side concerned with the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, a reflection that was acceptable across the German political spectrum. Despite this, Czechia did not unambiguously declare the expulsion a lawless act, creating resentment among the Sudeten Germans. This increased intra-coalition pressures on Chancellor Kohl, who had the final decision about the character of the German-Czech Declaration and also about the resolution of this contradictory aspect of historical German-Czech relations. Chancellor Kohl monopolised the issue, limited the mandate given to the main negotiators – State Secretary Peter Hartmann and Minister of Foreign Affairs Klaus Kinkel – and planned to exert his veto, creating concern among both politicians and civil society as to whether the chancellor’s actions were constitutional. In this context, President Weizsäcker questioned the democratic means which Chancellor Kohl used with respect to the Sudeten German question in Czech-German relations (Kunštát 1998: 168).

The Sudeten German question and the issue of the Beneš decrees were also addressed in the late 1990s by other leading Czech and German politicians. Miloš Zeman, the Czech prime minister at the time, declared that the Beneš decrees had expired. At the same time, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder declared that his government would support no property claims against the Czechs. These proclamations helped to ease previous political tensions between the two partner countries, especially as concerned with the Sudeten German question; however, due to the political campaign predominantly waged by Bavarian politicians, who continued to focus on questions of the past, these issues remained a latent problem in German-Czech relations in subsequent years. In theory, they could have constituted risk factors for the beginning of pre-accession negotiations between Czechia and the EU, if the Sudeten Germans were to restate their claims (Dauderstädt 2007: 427). Until 2010, Bavaria distanced itself from the German-Czech Declaration that had been adopted. In 2000 and 2003, CSU members of the European Parliament even voted against the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU (Valenta 2017: 44).

Fundamental to these issues is the question of reconciliation, which influences the measure of relations and friendship between the two nations. The majority of the Czech and German populations, which survived the war and its consequences, is unable, despite efforts, to accept definitive reconciliation and develop a balanced view of the past. It is inevitable that both sides understand and accept the different perspectives on their

shared past. But, for Germany, Czech-German relations are not the main priority of German foreign policy, in consequence of which it is not the primary aim of the federal government to fully deal with the past and to close the divergent issues of the expulsion of Sudeten Germans and reparations for Czechs for the period of World War II (Cordell and Wolff 2005: 164–165).

Despite the efforts of multiple diplomatic activities at various levels, and the close dialogue within academia and civil society, it is evident that in the Czech Republic this topic can be used for political mobilisation (Fiala and Kadlecová 2016: 51). However, most experts agree that current Czech-German relations are encumbered not so much by the past, as by the present and the future, and that this is due to the two countries' divergent positions on the refugee crisis and future developments in European integration (Pavlíček 2017: 32).

Evaluating Germany's actions towards the Czech Republic as concerned with these issues, I come to the conclusion that during the negotiations of the German-Czech Declaration, which was to serve as a fundamental document for dealing with the negative historical experience, Germany did not behave as an ideal civilian power. This statement is supported by the actions of Chancellor Helmut Kohl. On the one hand, he supported the final wording of the Declaration, and said alongside his Czech colleague that the questions of the past would not encumber the positively developing bilateral relations between the two countries. On the other, he was unable to withstand the domestic political and especially intra-coalition pressures exerted by the CSU and the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft supported by the party, who appealed the abolition of the Beneš decrees. In consequence of the prevailing pressure and despite the signing of the Declaration, Kohl proclaimed that the questions of the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans and dealing with the past were not over. At the same time, during the negotiations themselves he was willing to exercise his veto over the final wording of the Declaration, as well as to circumscribe the powers of the foreign affairs minister and the state secretary. These steps do not correspond with the behaviour of a civilian power, which emphasises the principles of democracy, good governance and the rule of law, but rather to the actions of a state which at the time of its reunification and the renewal of its position of power in Europe was primarily pursuing its own national interests.

## **Conclusion**

The main points of dispute between Germany and the Czech Republic appeared on two levels. The first is the multilateral level in the EU, where there are fundamental discrepancies between the positions of the Czech and German governments. The second is the exclusively bilateral level, connected with the conclusion of the Czech-German Declaration.

With the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union, the character of Czech-German relations changed, in consequence of their incorporation into the multilateral framework of supranational organisations. Within this supranational community, bilateral relations between states play an important role, particularly in those areas where the role of the state as an actor of the supranational decision-making process has been strengthened. In the European context, one may note that the relationship between Czechia and Germany are seen as close, particularly by the Czechs, and this closeness is dependent on the geographical, historical and cultural proximity between the two countries and their economic links (Belling 2016: 102).

Although the Czech Republic is aware of the importance of its relationship with Germany, in their bilateral relations several points of dispute have appeared that are linked with the evolution of the EU, specifically with its institutional aspects, the resolution of the Eurozone crisis, and the still ongoing migration crisis. These points of dispute have led to stagnation in the relations between Czechia and Germany. Not just the differences of opinion between Czech and German politics, but also domestic political disunity, prevailing in Czechia between Prime Minister Nečas government members – especially TOP09 politicians – and President Klaus, were problematic. The Eurosceptic pronouncements made by President Klaus led to a decrease in Germany's interest in making an effort to convince Czech political leaders about the correct and appropriate decisions, for instance as concerned with resolving the Eurozone crisis, the adoption of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which the Czech Republic rejected. Nečas's government implemented a foreign policy focused on economic cooperation, institutional opt-outs from participation in certain measures or treaties, and an "à la carte Europe" strategy. The change in Czech foreign-policy orientation only came with the rise of the social democratic party led to power by Prime Minister Sobotka, who represented a pro-European course, aiming to become part of the mainstream of European integration, despite the fact that Czechia was not a member of the Eurozone (Handl 2013: 8).

Such a scenario could be observed in the case of Czechia, which at the beginning rejected the austerity measures pushed by the German government. Germany did not see Czechia as an essential, or even significant, partner on the support of which Germany's ability to ensure a successful implementation of its strategy for resolving the crisis would depend. The decisions were adopted despite the Czech criticisms, and this ultimately led to a change in the Czech positions. In the end, the Czech conservative government supported Germany's strict austerity measures within the framework of EU fiscal coordination, and on common banking supervision over the EU budget (Belling 2016: 103). Regarding migration crisis as one important multilateral divergence in Czech-German relations German behaviour does not correspond with ideal type of civilian power. Although civilian power behaviour was applied towards refugees in terms of their human rights protection, towards the Czech Republic and other EU members Germany

pursued unilateral decisions, such as to open European borders or to set up compulsory quotas. As a consequence German behaviour tended to behaviour of a middle power or servant leader.

The above analysis of the disputed point of the questions of the past linked with the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from the then-Czechoslovakia, and with reparations for Czech victims of the Nazi regime, leads me to note that historical issues remain an open problem in bilateral Czech-German relations. This is despite the fact that the German-Czech Declaration was concluded in 1995, and serves as a compromise solution; and despite the statements made by multiple leading political experts on both sides to the effect that bilateral Czech-German cooperation was not encumbered by the past.

As Gniazdowski (2004: 202) argues, issues of the past remain in the background of Czech-German relations, determining them to some extent. Political leaders on both sides are reluctant to reopen the contradictory questions of the past and are particularly interested in finding areas for bilateral cooperation, as well as collaboration at the European level, with the aim of avoiding confrontation, stagnation or negative developments in the relations from which both sides derive a profit. Despite all this, the inability and unwillingness of previous Czech and German governments finally to resolve the issue of military reparations, the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans or the compensation of Czech victims of Nazism, opens an opportunity for extremists groups in both German and Czech societies, which are able to engage politically via forceful propagandist campaigns aimed at undecided and unsatisfied voters, influencing public opinion and hence election results, at the regional, national and European levels.

Based on this analysis of the disputed points in German-Czech bilateral collaboration, it can be concluded that Germany's actions towards Czechia diverse in some aspects from the behaviour of an ideal civilian power. Germany is aware of its power – especially its soft power – which it can exercise vis-à-vis the medium and small countries of Central Europe, including the Czech Republic. For that reason, as it was mentioned, German actions can be characterised as the behaviour of a trade state (during the Eurozone crisis), a middle power (as concerned with questions of the past) or a “servant leader” (during the Eurozone and refugee crises). In this, the primary national interests come to the fore, not just bilaterally but also multilaterally, as part of which the fundamental European issues are resolved.

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