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Atlanticism and Security Policy in Poland and in the Czech Republic

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INTRODUCTION

Atlanticism has been present in the security policies and foreign policy strategies of Poland and the Czech Republic since 1991–1992. It has similar and different features in the two countries. In the light of the possible deployment of the United States' missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic, it is timely to compare and contrast these features.

GENERAL FEATURES

Atlanticism in both Poland and the Czech Republic emphasises the special importance of the United States to the European security system. The point of departure is that NATO—and within NATO, the United States—is best able to guarantee the security of both countries. For the Poles, Atlanticism is a matter of their country's security and defence against a large and strong eastern neighbour (Russia) and a large and strong western neighbour (Germany). The Czechs, for their part, tend to underline their distrust of Germany; in the light of the geographical distance, they now fear Russia less.

Poland trusts neither its Russian neighbour nor its German neighbour. This is a consequence of historical experiences going back several centuries and the attacks that Poland suffered from both sides in the twentieth century. The Poles require a counterbalance, the assistance of a third major power—the United States. This is the experiential basis of Poland's present Atlanticism. Since the Poles fear Germany in both the European Union and NATO and do not fully trust France (because of its pro-Russian bias), the United States remains the superpower that they can trust. According to their own assessment, NATO membership—attained in 1999—was a decisive step for an independent and democratic Poland; it was a step with far-reaching consequences for the country's security, political stability and economic development. With the West's assistance (that is, by employing the Western option), Poland rewrote the legacy of Yalta; it embedded its security in a geopolitical constellation that represents an opportunity denied to Poland for three hundred years.

The essence of Czech Atlanticist policy is the idea that the Czech Republic is a member of an organisation (NATO) that guarantees the United States' presence in Europe, thereby adding to the security and stability of Europe. In this context, the exceptional role of the United States as a global superpower is often highlighted, as is also the importance of ensuring the presence, in the Czech Republic, of the highest possible ratio of American capital (as a counterbalance to German capital). In Czech foreign and security policy strategies, emphasis is placed on developing cordial and friendly relations with the United States as an ally.

In both the Czech Republic and Poland, the development of Atlanticism took place over the course of a decade (1989–1999), during which a formerly hostile NATO became a friendly organisation. In both countries, membership of this organisation was formulated as a desire and as a goal.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLISH ATLANTICISM

As the country's freedom and independence began to be restored in the initial months of the political transition (at the time of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's government), Polish foreign policy was characterised by quiet and cautious diplomacy. Poland faced three security policy options: Finlandisation, neutrality and the Western option. The country's principal political forces soon rejected the first two options, as both of them would have led to the country's marginalisation in security policy terms. The events of 1990 and 1991—Germany's reunification and the attempted coup in the Soviet Union—prompted Poland (with others) to decide in favour of the Western option. Previously, the Poles had been preoccupied with the winding up of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, as well as with Polish–Russian and Polish–German relations. In 1990 and in 1991, they were interested primarily in the possibility of expanding the CSCE and the pan-European security system. By means of its unification, Germany as a whole became a NATO member; NATO thus became an immediate neighbour of Poland, but it was not yet a potential guarantor of Poland's security. The idea of binding the country to the West was initially formulated in the government programme of 1992.

Within the scope of the Western option, Poland's relationship to NATO and to the United States became one of the most persistent issues on the agenda. The issue first appeared in Polish security policy deliberations at the time of the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1991–1992. Within two years, the Poles reached the conclusion that the cheapest way of safeguarding their country's security interests was to participate in, and become a member of, Western institutions.

Formal relations with NATO were established as early as 1990, but it was in 1992 that Polish foreign policy began to stress the importance of an American presence as a force necessary for Europe's stability.

For Poland, the most tangible proof of its detachment from the Soviet Union was the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon in the summer of 1991. A further milestone was the withdrawal of Soviet troops—which finally took place in 1994. (Although Soviet fighting units left the country in late 1992, nevertheless trains carrying troops, armaments and equipment from the GDR and elsewhere continued to pass through the country until 1994.)

In 1991 and 1992, neither NATO nor the EC was in a position to welcome prospective applicants with open arms. They were not yet ready to receive the Central Europeans, who had just regained their independence. The two organisations were hesitant and often rather dismissive, as they did not want to upset the Russian leadership. For the West, Moscow and the conventional arms limitation process were important factors. Regional stability was fragile; under these circumstances, NATO chose a new strategy: the gradual extension of a commitment towards Central Europe.

Like other countries in the region, Poland had no wish to become a permanent buffer zone subject to East–West superpower rivalry. Polish governments were also cautious when making political statements: they stressed their desire for closer relations with NATO rather than for membership of the organisation. In late 1991, they accepted that they were not needed by NATO, and that several years might have to pass before they were needed. NATO also made sure that they were aware of this.

In the process of forging closer relations with NATO, an important development took place in February 1991 when the Visegrád Three (Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary) declared their intention to cooperate on matters of integration into the European organisations. They confirmed this intention in the Visegrád Declaration of May 1992, which noted their common intention to join NATO and to cooperate with each other for this purpose.

In early 1992, the new Olszewski government's strategy identified the West as the direction of security for Poland. It noted that neutrality was no longer an alternative to NATO membership. It was in the same year that Poland made known its long-term intention to become a NATO member. It wished to achieve this goal in a gradual, step-by-step manner, while striving for good bilateral relations with the member states and for good relations with the Alliance itself. In mid-1992, even the media was reporting that Poland had switched options; it had turned from the East to the West, and it was already implementing this new orientation in its economy and wished also to do so in its foreign and security policy.

As governments changed in Poland, the demand for NATO membership was formulated with varying degrees of conviction. But from November 1992 onwards, membership was the strategic goal in every security policy review. Indeed, in subsequent periods, the principal objective was NATO membership, integration into the Western structures, and the establishment of good-neighbourly relations. This was Poland's threefold foreign policy priority, which was supported, in the long term, by all the country's major political forces, in spite of debates and criticisms. Political and social support was strengthened by events and developments underway at the time in the Soviet Union and then in Russia. Public support for NATO membership was as high as 73–83 percent.

The first institutional framework for joint action with NATO was the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). At the time of its foundation, Polish officials stated that they regarded NATO as the cornerstone of European security and the United States' military presence in Europe as a factor in the continent's stability.

In 1993, the Democrats took control of the US Congress. A narrow group of US foreign policy-makers began to consider the possibility of NATO expansion. At this time the Polish government began its diplomatic lobbying with this aim in mind. There was no change in this situation even when the left-winger Aleksander Kwaśniewski became President of Poland. Even so, concerns were raised: how, for instance, would Russia react if NATO drew closer to its borders? Naturally, Russia's protests were increasingly vehement.

Russia urged the establishment of an all-European security system under the auspices of the CSCE. It wished then to subordinate NATO and the WEU to this new system. This explains why Boris Yeltsin protested when, in September 1993, Polish President Lech Wałęsa wrote a letter to Manfred Wörner, the NATO secretary-general, requesting Poland's

acceptance into NATO. By way of protest, Yeltsin also wrote a letter to NATO; he cited a promise made by the Western powers in return for Russia's consenting to Germany's reunification, namely that Poland would not be granted NATO membership. In response to his protest, Poland began to lobby in the United States for membership. The Polish embassy in Washington and the large Polish community in the United States contributed significantly to this effort.

By the end of the year and early 1994, NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) plan had been elaborated; the plan offered membership to applicants individually (rather than as a group). Its main point was that the defence structures had to gradually draw closer to NATO. This did not satisfy the Poles, but they consoled themselves with the fact that they now had an opportunity to consult with NATO in the event of a threat. The fact that it prescribed civilian control of the armed forces and also required a civilian as minister of defence enhanced the significance of the PfP. Furthermore, the scheme even allowed Russia to join it.

The Poles joined the PfP, and this proved to be a valuable step towards the gradual attainment of NATO membership. Poland's involvement in the Partnership was exemplary; the Poles wished to fulfil all the required conditions as rapidly as possible. In the autumn of 1994, a joint military exercise was even held in Poland. Each task was taken seriously and all efforts were made. The following year Poland took part in NATO military exercises, and in 1995 it sent peacekeeping troops (a contingent of 670 men) to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Polish policy also gave due attention to the WEU, sensing that a readiness to become fully involved would facilitate the granting of membership.

An important factor during preparations for membership was military cooperation with NATO. The leaders of NATO expressed recognition and admiration for Polish military leaders and the army's performance within the PfP. The Polish government made considerable financial and intellectual efforts to meet the criteria. One reason for this was the fact that the army is an important symbol of Polish sovereignty—both for the Polish elite and for Polish society. Indeed, the army holds an esteemed position in society and in Polish historical traditions; society has high regard for its soldiers and its army, attributing great significance to them. The principal actors in the wars of independence and liberation were Polish soldiers, the legions of Polish recruits and the armies of Poles.

In 1994–1995, Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev announced a new foreign and security policy doctrine, giving rise to concern and anxiety among the Poles. This military doctrine reformulated the Russian demand for superpower status and sought to return the post-communist countries to Russia's sphere of influence. Mention was made of the “near abroad”, which was understood to mean the former satellite states, including Poland. At the time, 70 percent of Poles thought that Russia was a military threat to the country. NATO membership ambitions served to strengthen public hostility towards Russia.

From the Russian side, there was constant pressure on NATO not to expand and on Poland not to seek membership. Polish–Russian relations have not been good ever since the change of political regime; indeed, depending on the government in power, relations have been either poor or antagonistic. Over the years, the mutual relationship has given rise to many hostile gestures, almost all of which have drawn attention to the great number

of unresolved problems that have accumulated over the centuries. Another notable feature is the propaganda war perpetrated by both sides. Several attempts have been made to improve relations—for instance, when the Polish post-communists were in power. But such attempts have been rather unsuccessful.

Russia clearly sought to hinder Poland's NATO membership. It claimed that Polish membership would lead to tensions between the West and Russia. (A Russian general even declared that Poland's NATO membership might lead to World War III.) A number of threats were made against Poland. From time to time, there were problems with the gas supply, and Russia's secret services stepped up their activities in the country. One of Gazprom's intimidating actions has been the construction of a gas pipeline from Russia to Germany under the Baltic Sea, enabling it to circumvent Poland. In this way it hopes to exclude Poland from Russian gas supplies, thereby diminishing Poland's strategic significance. The demand for a Russian corridor to Kaliningrad was also seen as an unfriendly act.

Following the initial German gestures in the early 1990s, German–Polish relations were damaged by the demands for financial compensation of Germans expelled from the country after 1945. Polish governments have tended to stress different aspects of the relationship, and this has influenced the social and political climate. Relations with Germany are, however, “kept in check” by the framework of EU integration.

In connection with its plan to offer military assistance to the Central Europeans, and acting under pressure from the United States and Germany, NATO produced a study—in late 1994—about the consequences of expansion and its effect on European security. In the autumn of 1995, a paper setting out the criteria of NATO membership was published.

In mid-1995, the Polish government began making serious preparations for the time when the country would be accepted into NATO. It made its progress known, with one eye on the membership criteria. By the beginning of 1996, Poland had met the criteria set. In 1996–1997, many individual consultations were held with NATO. Meanwhile, the foreign and security policy endeavours of successive Polish governments remained the same: each of them demonstrated the collective will and shared intention for NATO membership.

The United States exerted constant diplomatic pressure on NATO member states, with a view to persuading them to accept the new members. Madeleine Albright sought—alongside the candidate countries—to convince the member states that Western Europe's security depended on Central Europe, and that it was worth accepting new members and expanding NATO as a means of furthering Europe's democratic integration. It was also an appropriate way of arranging for the United States to commit itself to the defence of Europe.

In the summer of 1997, three countries—Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary—were finally invited to join NATO. This was followed by the negotiations for accession, member-state ratifications, and finally—on March 12, 1999—the final signature to the agreement. Subsequently, Poland had to prove on an ongoing basis that the concept of solidarity among allies was not alien to it. The first occasion arose almost immediately—on March 25, 1999, during the bombing of Serbia.

Polish Atlanticism performed well during this first test, but it became even more apparent at the time of the Iraq War, in the light of the Poles' determined involvement. In 2003, George Bush told President Kwaśniewski that his country was the United States' best friend in Europe. Poland assisted the Americans in the Iraq War by sending troops. It also signed the "letter of the eight", in which it supported a possible armed invasion of Iraq. The public continued to support this until the deaths of Polish soldiers.

Despite prior reassurances from the United States, Poland did not receive political or economic benefits in return for its participation and endurance in the Iraq War. The United States does not intend to abolish its visa requirements for Polish citizens (whereas the Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians and others have received a promise to this effect).

Polish foreign policy (especially, from 2006, under the government of Jarosław Kaczyński) underlined Poland's special relationship with the United States—a relationship complicated by European anti-Americanism. Kaczyński proved the nature of this special relationship when he agreed, without setting major conditions, to the deployment of parts of the US missile defence system in southern Poland (Redzikowo).

Reflecting the frequent changes of government, the emphasis of Polish Atlanticism sometimes changes. This applies even to the new government, established in November 2007 under Donald Tusk's leadership.

Poland has no wish to draw a distinction between Atlantic and European factors in its security policy. Instead, it wishes to apply both sets of factors together. For this reason, it seeks to reduce tensions in the transatlantic relationship. Its participation in the expansion of the US missile defence system reflects this—as does its effort to link this with similar defence ideas raised by NATO.

The EU's "failures"—including, for instance, the unsuccessful attempt to establish an energy security pact—have encouraged Poland to adhere to its Atlanticist position.

Poland, as it assesses its security policy situation, recognises that it has tasks as a NATO member in the eastern half of Europe. It is also aware that its position is important in such matters, and that it must promote democratic and free market values in this direction. Warsaw supports the cooperative initiatives that have formed in response to Russian neo-imperialism (GUAM: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). It backs Ukraine's Western aspirations and assists the opposition in Belarus as well as Georgian independence. In this way it has caused tensions in Polish–Russian relations, which have become "warlike" due to the possible deployment of the US missile defence system.

Some Polish experts believe that, for the West, Poland's importance depends on the place that it can occupy in the East (in Europe), as well as the extent of its commitments there. Others believe the reverse: namely, that the extent of Poland's detachment from the eastern half of the continent depends on its embeddedness in the West. Still, in order to be able to offer assistance to its eastern neighbours, Poland needs the security umbrella of NATO, the United States and the EU.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CZECH ATLANTICISM

At the start of the political transition (1990–1992), Czech(oslovak) foreign policy and diplomacy—in contrast to that of Poland—acted quickly and dynamically. The shapers of the country’s foreign policy (President Václav Havel, the former dissident who had been raised to the country’s highest post, and Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier, also a former opposition member) set about implementing an almost complete programme under the slogan “Back to Europe”.

The initial period in the development of Czech Atlanticism dates to the end of 1989 and the early part of 1990. It was often emphasised at the time that the Czechs’ policy of Atlanticism had traditions going back to the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939). In February 1990, President Havel was invited to the United States, where he delivered a speech to the two Houses of Congress. In the speech he underlined the United States’ important role in the security of Europe. Havel’s political personality was crucial to the development of Czech Atlanticism: from the outset, he forged particularly good relations with the US government and presidents, and this had a significant effect on the quality of Czech policy towards the United States. (With some exaggeration, one may state that Havel was the embodiment of Czech Atlanticism. His Atlanticism characterised the foreign policy of the Czech presidential office until 2003, since he was president from late 1989 until March 2003—with the exception of a break of a few months.)

The Atlanticism of the Czech political elite was strengthened in 1993 when a new US ambassador to the United Nations was appointed in the person of Madeleine Albright, who, because of her Czech roots, showed more than the usual level of interest in the post-communist democracies and made no secret of her attraction to the region. The positive aspects of this also had an effect on Poland and Hungary’s chances of NATO membership. (Albright served as ambassador to the UN between 1993 and 1996, during Clinton’s first presidential term. During the second Clinton presidency, between 1996 and 2000, she was the United States’ secretary of state.)

A pro-American stance became an element of Czech government policy after 1990; the Czechs recognised that the new European political structure could not be shaped without the active involvement of the United States. Moreover, they wished to preserve cordial and friendly relations, in the light of the United States’ role as a world power. They hoped that the United States and the Western European structures would render the Central European region secure. With the collapse of the bipolar world and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, they initially believed that NATO should be disbanded. Within months, however, they had changed their minds.

The Czechs requested various types of assistance from the United States as they sought to dismantle or restructure Czechoslovakia’s armaments industry (an intergovernmental joint committee was even established for this purpose), with a view to finding replacements for the old communist markets. Indeed, Foreign Minister Dienstbier even raised the possibility of a new Marshall Plan for the ex-communist countries of Eastern Europe. Following the Russian coup attempt of 1991, the Atlanticist orientation was given even

greater emphasis; the Czechs often noted the stabilising role played by the United States in the Central European region. They also acted to strengthen intraregional cooperation: they attempted to establish the joint representation of interests among the Visegrád countries, and they also formulated their demand that the country be permitted to join NATO.

After the division of Czechoslovakia, the 1993 government programme of the now independent Czech Republic (CSK) already referred to NATO membership as a security policy priority. All Czech governments have identified the integration process as a principal goal; they have developed the country's bilateral relations with those countries that could enhance this process. Included in this group was, of course, the United States. As far as the present international balance of power and the international system are concerned, the United States holds a key position; for this reason, it requires special attention.

For the governments of the Czech Republic—those of both the left and the right—NATO counted as the embodiment of the transatlantic relationship with the United States. The right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) led the governments that held power in the Czech Republic from mid-1992 until mid-1998. The party continually emphasised the importance of the US presence in the Central European region, although some of its politicians (most notably Václav Klaus and Jan Zahradil) condemned NATO's intervention in Serbia at the time of the Kosovo crisis in 1999. The ODS's pro-Atlanticist foreign policy orientation has consistently determined the foreign policy strategies of both the party and governments led by the party. The same is also true of the smaller right-wing parties (the Christian Democrats, and various liberal and conservative parties hostile to Klaus), which have formulated—in even plainer terms than the ODS—the need for an American presence in Europe in order to preserve the balance of power.

The Social Democrats—who led the country from mid-1998 until the end of 2006—have also been supporters of the Atlanticist orientation of Czech security policy, although they have voiced their opposition to the stationing of foreign troops on Czech soil and have gradually switched to asserting the importance of European security.

Under the Klaus governments (1992–1996, 1996–1997) the most important factor was a strengthening of investment and trade relations with the United States. (In 1993, the United States was the source of more than half of the foreign investment in the country.)

From 1993, the eight-year friendship between Havel and Clinton as heads of state left its mark on Czech Atlanticism. Bill Clinton (with Albright at this side) rewarded Prague: he often travelled there, and it was in the Czech capital that he announced the PFP. Because of the latter—which was regarded by Prague as a perpetual waiting room—Czech foreign policy-makers became rather disappointed or even embittered, but they did not alter their pro-Atlanticist stance.

It was viewed as a success of Czech Atlanticist policy that, rather than collectively address the Visegrád Four, the invitation to NATO membership was made, in the end, on the basis of the individual performance of countries.

The manifest Atlanticist orientation of Czech foreign policy was strengthened by the fact that the Czech Republic was willing to participate, at NATO's side, in the Bosnian intervention and the Iraq War. Additional results of this were the United States' decision to transfer Radio Free Europe to Prague as well as its support for the Czech Republic's bid for OECD membership, which it received more quickly than anyone else (1995). In

1995–1996, leading politicians in the Klaus government considered their relations with the United States to be completely free of problems, since, unlike the other post-communist countries, the Czech Republic was stable.

Before the final stretch in the campaign for NATO membership, the Czech Republic exercised light pressure (by way of Albright) on the US leadership with a view to preventing Russian protests against NATO expansion from discouraging the Americans and to stop them from creating a framework that would mean less than full NATO membership.

Between November 1997 and the summer of 1998, the Czech Republic experienced major political changes after a government crisis: first, a temporary right-wing government was formed; then—after parliamentary elections—the Social Democratic left took the reins of government. This meant a change of political course; in foreign policy, alongside the priority of NATO membership, greater emphasis was laid on EU membership as a foreign policy goal.

The first major dispute in Czech–US relations was caused by Radio Free Europe’s broadcasts to the East. The temporary government formed by Tošovský (which held office from November 1997 until June 1998) permitted broadcasts only to Iran, whereas Radio Free Europe also broadcast to Iraq—which increased the security risk to the Czech Republic and was also damaging to Czech–Iranian relations. The dispute ended with a “victory” for the United States.

In mid-1998, with the advent of Miloš Zeman’s Social Democratic government, the Social Democrats renounced their earlier demand for a referendum on NATO membership. In its programme, the new government identified NATO membership (with full rights and privileges) as the main aim; for the Social Democrats, relations between the United States and the Czech Republic were also important, and so they pledged to work consistently for a further improvement in the close and friendly relations between the two countries.

The 1999 accession of the Czech Republic to NATO was the most significant result of Czech foreign policy. Assessing this fact, President Havel indicated that NATO membership meant, among other things, that Czech–US relations had been raised to a new level. However, the Zeman government expressed on several occasions a rather unambiguous position on the United States, which was harmful to the US view of Czech foreign policy.

The relationship between Czech foreign policy and the United States did not improve when, in the same year, flyovers and bombings against Afghanistan, Sudan and then Kosovo were on the agenda. The foreign policy manoeuvrings of its Parliament and government damaged the Czech Republic’s formerly good reputation in the United States. There was no clear support for NATO—a cause of disappointment to the organisation’s politicians. At the beginning of the Bush presidency, the relationship deteriorated even further. The Czech Republic pressed for the adoption of a resolution in the UN stating that the United States was violating human rights in Cuba and condemning the economic sanctions imposed on Cuba. In response to this Czech foreign policy initiative, the United States threatened the audacious left-wing Czech foreign minister (Jan Kavan) that it would arrange for the Prague NATO summit—planned for November 2002—to be held elsewhere.

Thus the foreign policy of the Social Democratic government caused tensions in the relationship between the Czech Republic and the United States. For this reason, the right wing of Czech politics often criticised the Zeman government, which just prior to its departure further provoked the United States by deciding to purchase Swedish Gripen aircraft instead of US fighter planes. Wolfowitz condemned this deal for being superfluous; he referred to the negative effects on Czech–US relations. The matter was not such a good foreign policy launch for the next Social Democratic government, the government of Vladimír Špidla (2002–2004). The new prime minister considered friendly and allied relations with the United States to be important; he also valued the opinion of President Havel.

Following the attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, however, the Czech foreign policy leadership was ready to assist the United States “with all possible means”. It regarded the attacks as having been committed against NATO as a whole and against each member state. Both the unfailingly pro-American Havel and the Social Democratic government were willing to allow the Americans to cross the country’s airspace; furthermore, at US behest, 300 Czech soldiers were sent to Afghanistan to contribute to Operation Enduring Freedom.

The intervention in Iraq opened a further chapter in Czech Atlanticism. Once again the Czech Republic’s foreign policy lost its bearings, becoming rather unsteady and unpredictable. The Czechs sought to realise two types of strategy: one directed at the United States and the other directed at the Germans and French. The Czech Republic, as a new member of NATO and with links with the United States, bore testimony to a contradictory approach: President Havel signed the “letter of the eight”, thereby indicating a pro-American stance. However, Špidla and his government disagreed with this position; having disassociated themselves from Havel, they announced a divergent official position. The government understood the commencement of operations against Iraq, but it did not wish to become directly involved in them.

The intervention in Iraq divided the government coalition: the Social Democratic majority partner was opposed to it, while the Christian Democratic minority partner—to which Foreign Minister Cyril Svoboda belonged—asserted a pro-American position.

Shortly afterwards (from March 2003), Klaus, the new Czech president, formulated a position that ran contrary to that of his predecessor Havel. Consequently, it became even more difficult to understand and interpret Czech foreign policy. With his criticisms of the United States, Klaus set himself against his own party, the ODS, which usually took a pro-US line.

Klaus publicly condemned the attack on Iraq, while citing Czech public opinion. From then onwards, the relationship between the United States and the new Czech president was poor. Thus in foreign policy documents the Czech Republic was clearly a supporter of transatlantic relations, but in practice it did not join the coalition against Iraq. (Acting in petty response to what it considered a petty Czech foreign policy, the United States informed the Czech Republic in late 2004 that it was reducing the amount of military assistance destined for the country by a hundred thousand dollars, because this was the amount owed by Czech diplomats in New York for illegal parking.)

The United States requested the Czech Republic to provide a chemical defence unit to contribute towards the military effort, but the Czech parliament refused to authorise this. (Instead, the Americans were sent a chemical defence and landmine unit by Slovakia, which sought NATO membership at the time.) That this contradictory and unpredictable policy had no graver consequences was because Havel's signature was present on the "letter of the eight", which, as far as the United States was concerned, counted as the official Czech position.

The foreign policy of the next Social Democratic government, the Gross government (2004–2005), gave precedence to EU membership and EU factors. It emphasised the construction of a European and Euro-Atlanticist security system, explaining that the Czech government supported a consolidation of the partnership between the EU and the United States. Since the Czech Republic was now an EU member, the shaping and practical steps of Czech foreign policy received a new kind of framework. In the strategy, the hope was expressed that an enlarged EU would be an influential and effective partner for the United States, exerting a positive effect on efforts to resolve the world's problems. This government also judged the transatlantic alliance to be of primary importance.

Thereafter, the visa affair became an important factor in Czech policy towards the United States. The Visegrád countries together attempted to persuade the US government to change its policy on visas and include them in its Visa Waiver Program.

When Bush was elected as US president for the second time, President Klaus greeted him, emphasising that a secure and reliable alliance was in the Czech Republic's interest, and so, even after its accession to the EU, he would support close and effective transatlantic cooperation. (Klaus now had a strong desire to be welcomed by Bush at the White House.)

The Social Democratic government that held office between 2005 and 2006 under Prime Minister Jiří Paroubek made no change to the direction and emphasis of foreign policy. On the other hand, it publicly revealed that it was negotiating with the United States about the possible deployment in the Czech Republic of a radar system that would form a part of the missile defence shield.

In the summer of 2006, following elections, the right-wing ODS returned to power. Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek took a firm Atlanticist position on the deployment of the radar system; he supports implementation, even if two thirds of Czechs are against the radar system.

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An expert on Slovakia, Poland, Czech Republic and Visegrád Cooperation, Judit Hamberger earned a PhD in Political Science in 1996. From 1984 until 1988, she worked for the Central and East European Research Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. She then became an editor for the publishing house Akadémiai Kiadó. From 1992 until 2006 she was a senior research fellow at the Teleki László Institute. Since 2006, she has been a senior research fellow at the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs. Her main field of research is the politics of, and cooperation between, the Visegrád countries.

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