

<https://dx.doi.org/10.16926/gea.2024.01.02.24>

dr hab. Marcin CZYŻNIEWSKI, prof. UMK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3227-0035>

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun

e-mail: mcz@umk.pl

dr hab. Katarzyna WITKOWSKA-CHRZCZONOWICZ, prof. UMK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5165-1960>

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun

e-mail: kwch@umk.pl

## **The Second Presidency of the Czech Republic in the Council of the European Union (1st of July – 31st of December 2022)**

### **Introductory remarks**

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union, following the reform introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, remains an important institutional mechanism with important functions for the functioning of the Council of the EU. Each Member State takes over the rotating presidency of the Council every six months, coordinating the work of the Council at every level and ensuring its continuity<sup>1</sup>. The presidency is exercised in groups of three countries over a period of 18 months, with the countries jointly preparing a comprehensive, long-term programme for the presidency and then each country separately presenting priorities and objectives for its key six-month period. The Czech Republic holds its second ever presidency in a group with France (from 1 January 2022) and Sweden (from 1 January 2023). The Presidency of the Council of the European Un-

---

<sup>1</sup> See Article 16(9) TEU and Article 236(B) TFEU. See also European Council Decision 2009/881/EU on the exercise of the Presidency of the Council; Council Decision 2016/1316 of 26 July 2016 amending Decision 2009/908/EU laying down measures for the implementation of the European Council Decision on the exercise of the Presidency of the Council and concerning the chairmanship of the preparatory bodies of the Council.

ion<sup>2</sup> is an important mechanism, structured by the reforms of the Lisbon Treaty, and its preparation and effective exercise requires months of preparation and the accurate identification of priorities. The Czech presidency described in this paper was conducted under conditions of great surprise for the European Union from the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and therefore the good and effective conduct of the presidency required a high degree of flexibility and a significant reorientation of priorities according to unforeseeable circumstances. These circumstances in particular made it a demanding challenge for the Czech government and the entire Czech political class.

The aim of this article is to analyse how the Czech Republic fulfilled the tasks and challenges of its second presidency and how its holding of the presidency has affected the current situation of the European Union. An important element of this analysis will be the consideration of the external and internal conditions that shaped the priorities and activities undertaken by the Czech Presidency. To conduct the analysis, the authors pose the following research questions:

- whether changes in the internal and external conditions of the Presidency have affected its objectives, conduct and results?
- how did the Czech Presidency define the most important problems of the EU and was it able to propose and implement effective measures to solve them?
- whether the Czech Presidency was able to build consensus around the achievement of its objectives and place them on the wider EU agenda;
- Has the Czech Republic learnt the lessons of its first presidency, held in 2009?

## 1. External and Internal Determinants of the Czech Presidency

The Czech Presidency coincided with the mid-term of the European Parliament and the European Commission. It was a time when a number of proposals and solutions at various stages of the legislative process had already been developed, and the main task of the country holding the presidency is not so much to set new strategic goals as to seek compromise around ready-made projects<sup>3</sup>. Even at the beginning of the presidency, Łukasz Ogrodnik pointed out that 'the Czech presidency will be to a large extent a continuation of the French one - due to further work on EU reform, but also a similar assessment of some directions of the Union's development, e.g. migration policy'<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> See in detail e.g. J. Bauerschmidt, *Council of the European Union: Internal Organization* [in:] *Oxford Encyclopedia of EU Law*, March 2022; P. Dann, *The Council* [in:] *Oxford Principles of European Union Law*, vol. 1: *The European Union Legal Order*, eds. R. Schütze, T. Tridimas, Oxford 2018; H. de Waele, *Council of the European Union: Composition* [in:] *Oxford Encyclopedia of EU Law*, June 2022.

<sup>3</sup> V. Bartovic, V. Havelka, Z. Kasáková, *Priority předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU*, Praha 2020, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ł. Ogrodnik, 'Europe as a task' - the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, 'PISM Bulletin', 11 July 2022, p. 2.

The second Presidency took place in a significantly different institutional framework than that of 2009, i.e. prior to the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty<sup>5</sup>, which limited its competencies. This concerned, among other things, the area of common foreign and security policy, as the Treaty established the single-person function of the High Representative of the Union responsible for that area, the President of the Foreign Affairs Council. The Treaty also established the one-person function of the President of the European Council elected for a term of two and a half years with the possibility of one re-election<sup>6</sup>. As a result, the Presidency now focuses more on driving the European legislative process and less on the 'political agenda'.

The Czech Republic took over the presidency from France at a very difficult time, just after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the covid-19 pandemic and at a time of numerous internal turbulences within the European Union itself, related, for example, to the failure of some EU states to respect the rule of law. External circumstances decisively influenced the objectives and course of the presidency, which Vít Havelka described as 'six-month crisis management'<sup>7</sup>.

The Russian military aggression against Ukraine, launched on 24 February 2022 from the territory of the Russian Federation and Belarus, was met with an immediate response from the European Union and the governments of the Member States, which faced a serious military threat and destabilisation of the political situation in the territory immediately adjacent to the EU and a humanitarian crisis related to the exodus of refugees from Ukraine. The European Council, convened immediately, considered the incursion into Ukraine as an unprovoked and unjustified act of aggression for which the Russian Federation bears full responsibility<sup>8</sup>. The Council of the Union in the first days after the aggression decided to introduce several packages of sanctions imposed both on the Russian Federation and Belarus, including its financial institutions and economic entities, and on specific politicians of both countries. These included, among others. suspension of transactions with the Russian and Belarusian central banks, restriction of financial flows from the EU, exclusion of some banks from the SWIFT system, ban on transactions with designated state-owned enterprises, suspension of EU investments in Russia and Belarus in the fields of energy and mining, ban on exports of luxury goods, ban on imports of designated raw materials and fuels from Russia, ban on arms trade, closure of EU airspace to Russian aircraft and EU ports to Russian ships, suspension of visa facilitation for politicians, dip-

---

<sup>5</sup> The Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed on 13 December 2007, entered into force on 1 December 2009.

<sup>6</sup> M. Czyżniewski, K. Witkowska-Chrzczonek, *Prezydencja Republiki Czeskiej w Radzie Unii Europejskiej. Studium prawnopolitologiczne*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 55-76.

<sup>7</sup> V. Havelka, *2022 Czech Presidency: A Surprising Success*, Policy Paper, April 2023, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> European Council, *Extraordinary European Council (24 February 2022) - Conclusions*, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>.

lomats and officials<sup>9</sup>. On the day of the aggression, the European Union announced that

together with its international partners, it will continue to assist Ukraine and its people, including through additional political, financial, humanitarian and logistical support and through an international donors' conference<sup>10</sup>.

The Union also decided to temporarily liberalise trade with Ukraine. Not insignificant for the Czech presidency was the fact that it was held in a group with Sweden, which, by virtue of its geographical location, had a significant interest in security in Central and Eastern Europe and, as a result of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, decided to fundamentally change its policy of neutrality by applying for NATO membership in May 2022, together with Finland.

The Czech Republic was among the Nato countries that delivered arms and ammunition to Ukraine even before the Russian invasion. By a government decision at the end of January 2022, more than 4,000 artillery shells were transferred to it. After the Russian invasion began, assault rifles, machine guns and sniper rifles were also sent there, as well as heavy weaponry<sup>11</sup>. Along with Poland and Bulgaria, the Czech Republic was among the first EU countries to close its airspace to Russian aircraft as early as 25 February. They were also involved in strengthening the collective security of NATO's eastern flank by co-founding a battle group to be stationed in Slovakia. After the EU enacted diplomatic sanctions, Interior Minister Vít Rakušan announced efforts to have the EU suspend the granting of Schengen visas to all Russian citizens<sup>12</sup>. In mid-March, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala, together with the prime ministers of Poland and Slovenia, visited Kiev, besieged by the Russian army, where he advocated further sanctions on Russia and assured the Ukrainian authorities of support at the level of arms supplies and humanitarian aid<sup>13</sup>.

Due to its location and the large Ukrainian diaspora, the Czech Republic became the target of a huge wave of refugees from Ukraine: it is calculated that more than 385,000 Ukrainians arrived there in the first four months after the Russian aggression began<sup>14</sup>. The Czech Republic thus ranked third among the EU countries that received the largest number of Ukrainians fleeing the war, after Poland and Germany, and, counting the number of refugees per 100,000 inhab-

---

<sup>9</sup> *EU response to Russian aggression against Ukraine*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/#invasion>.

<sup>10</sup> European Council, *Extraordinary meeting of the European Council...*

<sup>11</sup> Ł. Ogródnik, *Czech response to Russian military aggression against Ukraine*, 'PISM Commentary', 3 March 2022, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Premiér Fiala jednal v Kyjevě s ukrajinským prezidentem Zelenským o další pomoci i o sankcích vůči Rusku*, <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/premier-fiala-jednal-v-kyjeve-s-ukrajinskym-prezidentem-zelenskym-o-dalsi-pomoci-i-o-sankcich-vuci-rusku-195118/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ł. Ogródnik, *'Europe as a task'...*, p. 1.

itants of the receiving countries, first<sup>15</sup>. Public opinion polls conducted in the first weeks of the war showed that an overwhelming majority of Czechs (70 per cent) were in favour of accepting refugees, but on the other hand revealed fears among a large part of the population about the impact of refugees on the standard of living and security of their own country<sup>16</sup>. It should be remembered that the Czech Republic was among the countries that consistently supported the development of democratic reforms in Ukraine and its European aspirations, providing support to EU initiatives in this regard, assisting Ukraine's central and local administrations, civil society organisations, and supporting the implementation of European standards<sup>17</sup>.

One of the most important consequences of the war in Ukraine was a significant threat to the energy security of the European Union, including the supply of raw materials and an increase in their price. As Zuzanna Nowak and Piotr Dzierżanowski remind us, problems with fluctuations in the price of raw materials for energy production started as early as 2021.

At first, they were due to the actions of Gazprom, which was already reducing gas supplies to the EU before the invasion of Ukraine. After the outbreak of the full-scale war, the situation worsened due to the violent reactions of the energy commodity markets [...] and the rapid withdrawal of EU countries from Russian supplies. An additional complication is the post-pandemic rebound in the economy stimulating energy demand<sup>18</sup>.

It was forecast that the European Union could face a crisis the likes of which had not been seen since the end of the Second World War, including the possibility of energy rationing. It was estimated that by the beginning of 2023, energy bills would reach around €500 per month for the average European family, which would mean an almost 200 per cent increase compared to 2021<sup>19</sup>. The Czech Republic has seen one of the largest increases in energy prices, which has become one of the most important topics in internal political disputes<sup>20</sup>.

The rise in energy prices has become one of the most important factors in the historically high level of inflation in the EU, which has exceeded 10 per cent in several months. For the whole of 2022, the average level of inflation in the Union, according to the HICP (*Harmonised Index of Consumer Price*) used by Eu-

<sup>15</sup> M. Klimešová, J. Šatava, M. Ondruška, *Situace urpchlíků z Ukrajiny*, Praha 2002, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Ústav empirických výzkumů STEM, *Ruská agrese proti Ukrajině: analýza nálad české veřejnosti*, Praha 2022.

<sup>17</sup> See P. Blažejewska, *The crisis in Ukraine in Czech foreign and security policy*, Eastern Studies, 2015, no. 1, pp. 39-49.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Nowak, P. Dzierżanowski, *Kryzys energetyczny a ochrona przedsiębiorstwa i konsumentów w UE*, 'PISM Bulletin', 6 June 2023, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Energy Crisis 2022*, <https://mappingair.meteo.uni.wroc.pl/2022/09/kryzys-energetyczny-2022/>.

<sup>20</sup> M. Jirušek, *The Czech EU Presidency: Strengthening Energy Security Amidst the Crisis*, Czech Journal of International Relations, 2023, no. 1, p. 149.

rostat, was 15 per cent.<sup>21</sup> The Czech Republic was one of the countries with the highest level of inflation: in June 2022, just before the start of the Czech presidency, it reached 17 per cent, significantly contributing to the decline in the purchasing power of the average family<sup>22</sup>.

In the run-up to the presidency, elections to the Chamber of Deputies were held in the Czech Republic in October 2021. EU topics, including the issue of the upcoming presidency, were not particularly present in the election campaign. Of the political parties with a chance of winning seats in the new Chamber, only one, the populist SPD, advocated against political integration of EU countries, even announcing a referendum on the Czech Republic's exit from the EU<sup>23</sup>. The ruling ANO party asserted in its election programme that preparation for the presidency would be one of the government's most important goals:

We will devote ourselves with maximum commitment to the Czech Republic's presidency of the Council of the EU and make full use of it not only to promote the topics that are important to us, but also to showcase our country's successes<sup>24</sup>.

The government, however, significantly reduced the expenditure on the presidency and thus the staffing of the institutions responsible for its preparation and conduct: the budget for the presidency was to be only 1.24 billion crowns, which was one third of the 2009 presidency budget. In the opinion of Brussels officials, no country had allocated an amount as low as this for its presidency. In June 2021, a group of economists and public figures published an open letter criticising the excessively low budget and warning of the consequences of such austerity<sup>25</sup>.

Vít Havelka saw the impact of the elections on the Czech presidency in the context of the Czech political culture, highlighting the lack of respect for continuity and the inability to cooperate between political actors. "New cabinets tend to change the policies of previous governments without considering the long-term effects of this political change," he argued in August 2021. Havelka stressed that the possible prolongation of coalition talks around the formation of a new government until 2022 would make it difficult to prepare viable priorities for the presidency<sup>26</sup>.

---

<sup>21</sup> D. Blaszkiewicz, *Inflation in Europe in 2022*, <https://obserwatorgospodarczy.pl/2023/02/15/inflacja-w-europie-w-2022-roku-polska-pozza-podium/>; The average inflation rate in the Czech Republic for the whole of 2022 was 14.8 per cent, the fifth highest among EU countries.

<sup>22</sup> D. Adunts, B. Kurylo, J. Špeciánová, *Inflační nerovnost v České republice*, "Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí Policy Brief", 2022, no. 8, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *SPD political programme*, <https://www.spd.cz/program-vypis/>.

<sup>24</sup> *Až do roztrhání těla! Ten jediný program, který potřebujete. Jako vždycky*, Praha 2021, <https://www.anobudeli.cz/file/edee/2021/ano-volebni-program.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> *Babiš odmítl kritiku přípravů předednictví EU. Chtějí se jen politicky zviditelnit, uvedl premiér*, [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/babis-odmitl-kritiku-priprav-predsednictvi-eu-pisatele-sech-teji-jen-zviditelnit-tvrdi.A210623\\_115805\\_In\\_domov\\_ljk](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/babis-odmitl-kritiku-priprav-predsednictvi-eu-pisatele-sech-teji-jen-zviditelnit-tvrdi.A210623_115805_In_domov_ljk).

<sup>26</sup> V. Havelka, *Topics: Czech 2022 Presidency to the Council of the EU*, "Europeum Policy Paper", Praha, August 2021., p. 2.

The elections brought a change on the Czech political scene, ANO, despite its high result, lost power and its coalition partner, ČSSD, did not enter parliament at all. The new government was built by two coalitions: SPOLU and STAN. The leader of the SPOLU coalition was the centre-right ODS and it was its leader, Petr Fiala, who became the new Prime Minister. The first post-election comments wondered what the new government's European policy would be like, recalling, among other things, Fiala's past statements of scepticism towards deepening European integration, including his opposition to the draft Constitutional Treaty, and the fact that in the European Parliament ODS MEPs belong to the European Conservatives and Reformists group, with, among others, the Polish Law and Justice.

The presidency came at the height of the election campaign for the presidential election scheduled for January 2023. The temperature was raised by the fact that the election was to bring a change in the position of president, as Miloš Zeman, who was finishing his second term, could no longer stand as a candidate. Polls indicated that former prime minister and ANO party leader Andrej Babiš, retired general Petr Pavel and economist Danuše Nerudová had the best chances of winning. Babiš was a protégé of outgoing President Zeman, who saw him as his successor, while Pavel (who eventually won the election) and Nerudová had the support of the ruling SPOLU coalition, although they were not its official candidates. As in the campaign for the Chamber of Deputies, among the presidential candidates only the SPD representative, Jaroslav Bašta, spoke critically of the Czech Republic's membership of the EU and of the EU itself, claiming, among other things, that it had brought the world to the brink of a third world war<sup>27</sup>.

According to opinion polls, the Eurosceptic attitude of Czechs has been deepening since the Czech Republic's accession to the EU<sup>28</sup>. Krzysztof Koźbiał assesses that "Czech society is undoubtedly one of the most negative towards the EU and integration among the 27 member states of the organisation"<sup>29</sup>. Surveys indicate that in terms of attitudes towards the EU, Czech society is divided into three equal groups: supporters of the EU (36 per cent of respondents), those who are reserved towards the EU (32 per cent) and its opponents (32 per cent)<sup>30</sup>. A survey conducted by the STEM studio for the Office of the Council of Ministers shows that in the run-up to the Czech Presidency (surveys from April and August 2021 and February 2022), in a possible referendum less than half of respondents would support

---

<sup>27</sup> *The EU has come to the end of the Third World War, says the SPD candidate for Hrad Bašta*, [https://www.idnes.cz/volby/rozhovor-s-kandidatem-spd-na-prezidenta-jaroslavem-bastou.A220910\\_170918\\_prezidentske-volby-2023\\_kop](https://www.idnes.cz/volby/rozhovor-s-kandidatem-spd-na-prezidenta-jaroslavem-bastou.A220910_170918_prezidentske-volby-2023_kop).

<sup>28</sup> A. Paczesniak, M. Perottino, *European policy of the Czech Republic*, 'ETE Working Paper', 2017, no. 4, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> K. Koźbiał, *The significance of Euroscepticism in the political scene of the Czech Republic* "Politeja", 2020, no. 3, p. 273.

<sup>30</sup> Ústav empirických výzkumů STEM, *Postoj veřejnosti k předsednictví ČR Evropské unii - zima 2022*, Praha 2022, available from [www.vlada.cz](http://www.vlada.cz).

the Czech Republic remaining in the EU (49, 48 and 46 per cent respectively). The research also showed that at the beginning of 2022, only 48 per cent of Czechs had heard that their country would hold the EU presidency, far less than in 2008, when the Czech Republic was preparing for its first presidency<sup>31</sup>.

The experience of the Czech Republic's first presidency of the Council of the European Union, held from 1 January to 30 June 2009, was of obvious importance for the preparation of the Czech presidency in 2022. It is evident from many, especially journalistic commentaries, including in the Czech Republic itself, that the assessment of the first presidency was fundamentally influenced by the internal political crisis that led to the collapse of the government in the middle of it. The authors of this article in the monograph on the 2009 presidency assessed it positively, pointing out that the success was, paradoxically, also determined by the way the presidency dealt with the aftermath of the government crisis without losing energy or influence on the current problems of the Union. However, as highlighted, Czech politicians

irresponsibly dragged the European Union into a sharp internal political dispute [...]. This action completely destroyed the image of the presidency (also in the media) and contributed to the highly critical assessments made of it<sup>32</sup>.

The assessment of the 2009 Presidency was also influenced by the anti-EU statements of the then President of the Republic, Václav Klaus, and his efforts to block the ongoing Lisbon Treaty ratification process, as well as the related criticism from a section of Western public opinion and politicians, including the French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, who, during the Czech Presidency, was active in what was seen as an attempt to run an unofficial, rival presidency. The next presidency was therefore an opportunity to erase that unfavourable image, although, if unsuccessful, it could reinforce it. At the beginning of 2021, i.e. while Prime Minister Andrej Babiš was still in office, Petr Kaniok predicted that the second presidency would be an even bigger disaster, as any potential left over from the experience of the first presidency had been squandered after 2009:

People dispersed, their *know-how* dissipated and the investments made proved worthless. To put it bluntly, none of the new Member States approached their presidency internally in such a tragic way and let all the positives that could have come out of it, and that could have been used, dissolve into indifference.

## 2. Priorities and key achievements of the Presidency

At a meeting of the European Parliament on 6 July 2022, Prime Minister Petr Fiala stated that Russia's aggression against Ukraine had 'turned the Czech plans

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> M. Czyżniewski, K. Witkowska-Chrzczoneowicz, op. cit. p. 356.

for the priorities of the presidency upside down<sup>33</sup>. In 2020, a study produced in preparation for the presidency indicated that the main topic to be addressed was environmental protection and the fight against adverse climate change, and one of the goals would be to reach an agreement on achieving climate neutrality in 2050. The authors of the study also emphasised the need to prepare solutions for the digital economy<sup>34</sup>. In turn, in August 2021, Vít Havelka also indicated the Eastern Partnership, the process of EU enlargement and liberalisation of the common market<sup>35</sup> as the most important areas of activity of the Presidency. In inaugurating the presidency, the Czech government presented five priority areas:

- Countering the refugee crisis and post-war reconstruction of Ukraine,
- energy security,
- strengthening European defence capabilities and cybersecurity,
- strategic resilience of the European economy
- resilience of democratic institutions<sup>36</sup>.

As Vít Havelka writes, "the Czechs deliberately placed Ukraine at the centre of the discussion during their presidency".<sup>37</sup>, approaching the issue very broadly. The idea was not only to deal with the immediate consequences of the war on an ongoing basis, but also to discuss and resolve it in a broader time frame and to emphasise the role of solidarity between the countries of the Union and its partners. The 20-21 October 2022 European Council reaffirmed its support for Ukraine's financial, military and humanitarian needs and its determination for its post-war reconstruction. It also condemned Russian war crimes against the Ukrainian people and asked the High Representative and the European Commission to explore ways to support Ukraine's efforts to ensure accountability for Russian war crimes. It condemned acts of sabotage targeting critical infrastructure and announced measures to increase the resilience of EU infrastructure.

In turn, the European Council on 15 December 2022 pledged increased humanitarian assistance and support for civil protection and the reconstruction of Ukraine's critical infrastructure. Agreement was also reached on macro-financial assistance and the agreement of the MFA+ facility, which was to support Ukraine's budget with €18 billion in 2023.<sup>38</sup> Under the Czech Presidency, three further packages of sanctions against Russia were adopted (packages 7, 8 and 9)

---

<sup>33</sup> European Parliament, *Verbatim Report of 6.07.2022*, p. 53, available from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/>.

<sup>34</sup> V. Bartovic, V. Havelka, Z. Kasáková, op. cit. p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> V. Havelka, *Outlook: 2022 Czech presidency of the Council of the EU*, Praha 2022, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57090/2022-jul-dec-cz-priorities.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> V. Havelka, *2022 Czech Presidency...*, p. 3

<sup>38</sup> *Information for the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland on the participation of the Republic of Poland in the work of the European Union in the period July-December 2022 (the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union)*, annex to Senate print no. 925 of 15 February 2023. p. 6.

and a cap on the price of Russian oil was agreed, in cooperation with the G7<sup>39</sup>. The success of the Czech presidency on sanctions was mainly based on convincing Hungary, which opposed the successive packages, hence talks on this issue lasted until the last minute and required the organisation of additional rounds of negotiations. The issue of Russian aggression against Ukraine was also raised with EU partners, including a summit with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries on 14 December 2022<sup>40</sup>, and a representative of the United States participated in a number of working and informal meetings on the situation in Ukraine. On 22 September 2022, a representative of the Czech Presidency addressed the UN Security Council, calling for the creation of a special tribunal to deal with Russian crimes in Ukraine<sup>41</sup>.

One of the first achievements of the Czech Presidency was the agreement on energy saving measures. The Czech Minister of Industry and Trade, Jozef Síkela, initiated discussions with the primary aim of minimising the effects of soaring energy prices<sup>42</sup>. The solutions adopted were to reduce electricity consumption by 10 per cent and to tax the excess profits of energy companies, i.e. those that exceed a 20 per cent increase in average annual income compared to 2018. The money from this tax was to be used to provide financial support to households and businesses. The Council agreed that Member States could temporarily set the price of electricity supply for small and medium-sized enterprises, even at a level below the cost<sup>43</sup>. Negotiators from the Council and the European Parliament reached a preliminary agreement on the REPowerEU project, under preparation since May 2022, which aimed to increase the diversification of energy sources and thus strengthen the EU's strategic energy autonomy<sup>44</sup>.

An important topic of the Czech Presidency was the work on the Pact on Migration and Asylum, the premises of which were presented in spring 2020. Its basis was the introduction of a mechanism for relocating refugees with the right to protection on the territory of EU countries, with Member States being able to choose other forms of support, including financing the return of migrants without the right to protection<sup>45</sup>. The Czech Presidency developed a proposal 'A way forward

---

<sup>39</sup> Úřad vlády České republiky, *Naplňování priorit předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU*, Praha 2022, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Information for the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland...*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Úřad vlády České republiky, op. cit. p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> V. Havelka, 2022 Czech Presidency..., p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> *European Union tightens policy over electricity prices*, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/unia-europejska-zaostrza-polityke-w-zwiazku-z-cenami-pradu-jestesmy-na-energetycznej-wojnie-z-rosja-6817978698402624a.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Council of the EU, *Press release of 14 December 2022*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/press/press-releases/2022/12/14/eu-recovery-plan-provisional-agreement-reached-on-repowereu/>.

<sup>45</sup> J. Szymańska, *Pact on migration and asylum - coupling the asylum system with return policy*, "PISM Commentary", 25.09.2020

on EU migration solidarity and emergency response mechanism', which - following a debate at technical level and the Strategic Committee on Immigration, Borders and Asylum (SCIFA) – was presented at the October JHA Council moving away from the paradigm of compulsory relocation to other forms of solidarity<sup>46</sup>.

As announced, the Czech presidency took up the discussion on the rule of law in Hungary and Poland. It was a success for the presidency that the provisional budget limiting funds for Hungary was adopted in December 2022, although initially it seemed that the discussion would be prolonged to such an extent that the decisions would only be taken up by the Swedish presidency<sup>47</sup>. The Czech presidency dealt with two projects included in the so-called democratic package: the draft regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations and the regulation on transparency and targeting of political advertising<sup>48</sup>.

In October 2022, the first meeting of the European Political Community was organised in Prague, an initiative presented a few months earlier by French President Emmanuel Macron as a platform for coordination with non-EU European countries. The Prague meeting was attended by representatives of 17 partner countries: Norway, Iceland, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia. They were primarily devoted to security, energy, climate and economic issues, as well as discussions on the future of the initiative<sup>49</sup>. The Czech Republic succeeded in proposing and implementing the agenda of the meeting in such a way as to allay emerging fears that Macron's initiative is an attempt to 'dilute' the EU's enlargement policy<sup>50</sup>.

In turn, at a separate EU-Western Balkans summit on 6 December 2022 in Tirana, the European Union adopted a new package of energy support within the countries of the region and also declared the opening of joint purchases of gas, LNG and hydrogen for Balkan partners<sup>51</sup>. The issue of EU enlargement was addressed at the first intergovernmental conference organised by the Czech Presidency on 19 July 2022. During it, it was decided to start negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. During the Czech Presidency, the European Council confirmed the decision of the General Affairs Council to grant EU candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo formally applied for EU membership<sup>52</sup>.

---

<sup>46</sup> Council of the European Union, *Pact on Migration and Asylum - way forward - discussion paper*, Brussels 25.11.2022.

<sup>47</sup> V. Havelka, 2022 Czech Presidency..., p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Information for the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland...*, p. 53

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> A.M. Pedziwol, *Czechs surprised: "Surprisingly consistent EU presidency"*, <https://www.dw.com/pl/czesi-zaskoczyli-zadziwiaj%C4%85co-konsekwentna-prezydencja-ue/a-64248338>.

<sup>51</sup> *EU-Western Balkans Summit in Tirana*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/meetings/international-summit/2022/12/06/>.

<sup>52</sup> Úřad vlády České republiky, *op. cit.* p. 3.

## Conclusions

European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans called the Czech presidency one of the most successful in the last few decades<sup>53</sup>. It took place in the special circumstances of a war just across the EU's eastern border, resulting not only in an immediate threat to the security of the Union, but also in serious problems in the energy market and a related economic downturn. In the face of these threats, it was not possible to avoid divergent points of view and differences in the diagnosis of the problems and the shape of the proposed solutions. During its Presidency, the Czech Republic has done a great deal of work to enable the Union to confront the problems besetting it with coherence and solidarity. The Czech Presidency, thanks to its numerous and well-prepared diplomatic efforts, managed to ensure unity in the European Union, searching for solutions for so long that they were acceptable to all Member States<sup>54</sup>. The result was the finalisation by the Czech Presidency of 41 pieces of legislation<sup>55</sup>. The Presidency's exceptional determination in matters of dispute and debate was evident, and was symbolised by Minister Jozef Síkela's T-shirt on which he printed the announcement: *We will convene as many Energy Councils as necessary* - eventually the Council of Ministers for Energy met eight times. The Czech Presidency fulfilled the envisaged agenda, and did so against a backdrop of necessary changes that had to be made to the agenda in the context of the war in Ukraine and its repercussions for EU countries.

The Czech Presidency responded effectively to changing external and internal conditions. It was able to define them already at the stage of initial organisational preparations, and then skilfully modified priorities, objectives and proposed activities. It correctly defined the most important issues from the point of view of the European Union and its future, building its agenda around them, an example of which are the Presidency's priorities, which reflect the state of play and the greatest challenges for European integration. The skilful definition of priorities and the correct response to the changing circumstances of the Presidency were one of the reasons why the Czech Republic found support from EU partners for the implementation of its goals. Maintaining the unity of the European Union in the face of both the response to Russian aggression (including the provision of support to Ukraine and new sanctions packages imposed on Russia) and the energy crisis is the greatest success of the presidency. The Union emerged from it as a strong and determined part of the global deal, and the EU energy market was saved from real collapse. The Czech Presidency did not focus

---

<sup>53</sup> A. M. Pedziwol, op. cit.

<sup>54</sup> *Results of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU*, <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20230320162159/https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/results-of-the-czech-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-eu/>.

<sup>55</sup> V. Havelka, 2022 Czech Presidency..., p. 3.

solely on managing the current crisis, remembering to promote issues that were important to it regardless of external circumstances. This included the enlargement of the European Union, which the Czech Republic has consistently supported. The war and the economic crisis did not provide a pretext for postponing discussions on enlargement policy, and the European Political Community initiative did not become a dead end in which the whole process could get stuck.

A report prepared by a group of twenty non-governmental organisations rated the role of the Czech presidency highest in the areas of humanitarian and development aid to Ukraine, management of the refugee crisis and promotion of human rights, and lowest in the area of implementation of solutions reached at the Conference on the Future of Europe, culture, innovation, support for the rule of law and civil society<sup>56</sup>.

The Czech presidency in 2022 was a solid homework from the previous presidency in 2009, with obvious consequences not only for the Union and its partners. Although the Czech Republic never aspired to be one of the leaders of the EU, the success of the presidency put it in a position to be among the inspirers and organisers of EU policy. The Czech Republic has also strengthened its position among Central European countries as a credible, reliable partner that understands the spirit of European integration, especially in view of Hungary's increasingly strong departure from its European course and expected problems in Slovak politics after the 2023 elections. High assessments of the Czech presidency may also motivate President Petr Pavel to deliver on his announcements to make the Czech Republic more active in the European Union, and give the Petr Fiala government an unambiguously pro-European face.

## Literature

- Adunts Davit, Kurylo Bohdana, Špeciánová Jitka, *Inflační nerovnost v České republice*, "Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí Policy Brief", 2022, no. 8.
- Až do roztrhání těla! Ten jediný program, který potřebujete. Jako vždycky*, Praha 2021, <https://www.anobudelizip.cz/file/edee/2021/ano-volebni-program.pdf>.
- Babiš odmítl kritiku přípravů předednictví EU. Chtějí se jen politicky zviditelnit, uvedl premier*, [https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/babis-odmitl-kritiku-priprav-predsednictvi-eu-pisatele-se-chteji-jen-zviditelnit-tvrdi.A210623\\_115805\\_In\\_domov\\_lijk](https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/babis-odmitl-kritiku-priprav-predsednictvi-eu-pisatele-se-chteji-jen-zviditelnit-tvrdi.A210623_115805_In_domov_lijk).
- Bartovic Vladimír, Havelka Vít, Kasáková Zuzana, *Priority předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU*, Praha 2020.
- Bauerschmidt, J., *Council of the European Union: Internal Organization* [in:] *Oxford Encyclopedia of EU Law*, March 2022.

---

<sup>56</sup> *Hodnocení českého předsednictví v Radě EU 2022 nestátními neziskovými organizacemi*, Brno 2023.

- Blaszkiwicz Dawid, *Inflation in Europe in 2022*, <https://obserwatorgospodarczy.pl/2023/02/15/inflacja-w-europie-w-2022-roku-polska-pozza-podium/>.
- Błazejewska Paulina, *Crisis in Ukraine in Czech foreign and security policy*, 'Wschodnioznawstwo', 2015, no. 1, pp. 39–49.
- Council of the European Union, *Pact on Migration and Asylum – way forward – discussion paper*, Brussels 25.11.2022.
- Czyżniewski Marcin, Witkowska-Chrzczonevicz Katarzyna, *Prezydencja Republiki Czeskiej w Radzie Unii Europejskiej. Studium prawnopolitologiczne*, Warsaw 2010.
- The EU has come to the end of the Third World War, says the SPD candidate for Hrad Bašta*, [https://www.idnes.cz/volby/rozhovor-s-kandidatem-spd-na-prezidenta-jaroslavem-bastou.A220910\\_170918\\_prezidentske-volby-2023\\_kop](https://www.idnes.cz/volby/rozhovor-s-kandidatem-spd-na-prezidenta-jaroslavem-bastou.A220910_170918_prezidentske-volby-2023_kop).
- Dann P., *The Council* [in:] *Oxford Principles of European Union Law*, vol. 1: *The European Union Legal Order*, eds. R. Schütze, T. Tridimas, Oxford 2018.
- de Waele H., *Council of the European Union: Composition* [in:] *Oxford Encyclopedia of EU Law*, June 2022.
- Havelka Vít, *2022 Czech Presidency: A Surprising Success*, Policy Paper, April 2023.
- Havelka Vít, *Outlook: 2022 Czech presidency of the Council of the EU*, Praha 2022.
- Havelka Vít, *Topics: Czech 2022 Presidency to the Council of the EU*, 'Europeum Policy Paper', Praha, August 2021.
- Hodnocení českého předsednictví v Radě EU 2022 nestátními neziskovými organizacemi*, Brno 2023.
- Information for the Sejm and the Senate of the Republic of Poland on the participation of the Republic of Poland in the work of the European Union in the period July-December 2022 (Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union)*, Annex to Senate print No. 925 of 15 February 2023.
- Jirušek Martin, 'The Czech EU Presidency: Strengthening Energy Security Amidst the Crisis', *Czech Journal of International Relations*, 2023, no. 1, pp. 147–158.
- Klimešová Magdaléna, Šatava Jiří, Ondruška Michal, *Situace urpchlíků z Ukrajiny*, Praha 2002.
- Koźbiał Krzysztof, *The significance of Euroscepticism in the political scene of the Czech Republic "Politeja"*, 2020, no. 3, pp. 261–276.
- Energy Crisis 2022*, <https://mappingair.meteo.uni.wroc.pl/2022/09/kryzys-energetyczny-2022/>.
- Nowak Zuzanna, Dierżanowski Piotr, *Kryzys energetyczny a ochrona przedsiębiorstw i konsumentów w UE*, 'PISM Bulletin', 6 June 2023.
- Ogrodnik Łukasz, 'Europe as a task' - the Czech Presidency of the EU Council, 'PISM Bulletin', 11 July 2022.
- Ogrodnik Łukasz, *Czech response to Russian military aggression against Ukraine*, 'PISM Commentary', 3 March 2022.

- Pacześniak Anna, Perottino Michel, *European policy of the Czech Republic*, 'ETE Working Paper', 2017, no. 4.
- European Parliament, *Verbatim Report of 6.07.2022*, p. 53, available from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/>.
- Pedziwol Aureliusz M., *Czechs surprised: "Surprisingly consistent EU presidency"*, <https://www.dw.com/pl/czesi-zaskoczyli-zadziwiaj%C4%85co-konsekwentna-prezydencja-ue/a-64248338>.
- SPD political programme, <https://www.spd.cz/program-vypis/>.
- Premiér Fiala jednal v Kyjevě s ukrajinským prezidentem Zelenským o další pomoci i o sankcích vůči Rusku, <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/media-centrum/aktualne/premier-fiala-jednal-v-kyjeve-s-ukrajinskym-prezidentem-zelenskym-o-dalsi-pomoci-i-o-sankcich-vuci-rusku-195118/>.
- Priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/57090/2022-jul-dec-cz-priorities.pdf>.
- European Council, *Extraordinary European Council (24 February 2022) - Conclusions*, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>.
- Council of the EU, *Press release of 14 December 2022*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/press/press-releases/2022/12/14/eu-recovery-plan-provisional-agreement-reached-on-repowereu/>.
- EU response to Russian aggression against Ukraine*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/#invasion>.
- Results of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU*, <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20230320162159/https://czech-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/results-of-the-czech-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-eu/>.
- EU-Western Balkans Summit in Tirana*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/meetings/international-summit/2022/12/06/>.
- Szymańska Jolanta, *Pact on migration and asylum - coupling the asylum system with return policy*, 'PISM Commentary', 25.09.2020.
- European Union tightens policy over electricity prices*, <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/unia-europejska-zaostrza-polityke-w-zwiazku-z-cenami-pradu-jestesmy-na-energetycznej-wojnie-z-rosja-6817978698402624a.html>.
- Úřad vlády České republiky, *Naplňování priorit předsednictví České republiky v Radě EU*, Praha 2022.
- Ústav empirických výzkumů STEM, *Postoj veřejnosti k předsednictví ČR Evropské unii - zima 2022*, Praha 2022, available from [www.vlada.cz](http://www.vlada.cz).
- Ústav empirických výzkumů STEM, *Ruská agrese proti Ukrajině: analýza nálad české veřejnosti*, Praha 2022.

## **Druga prezydencja Republiki Czeskiej w Radzie Unii Europejskiej (1 lipca – 31 grudnia 2022 roku)**

### **Streszczenie**

Opracowanie dotyczy prezydencji Republiki Czeskiej w okresie 1 lipca – 31 grudnia 2022 r. sprawowanej w Radzie Unii Europejskiej. Omówiono w nim uwarunkowania zewnętrzne i wewnętrzne prezydencji oraz jej priorytety, przebieg i efekty. Wskazano, że była to trudna prezydencja, z racji wybuchu agresji rosyjskiej na Ukrainę, a Czechy musiały w tym okresie sprostać wielu problemom, które jednocześnie dotyczyły całej Unii Europejskiej, jak i przetaczały się przez ich kraj, jak na przykład duży napływ uchodźców z terytorium Ukrainy objętego wojną. Czesi, pomimo dość rozpowszechnionych nastrojów eurosceptycznych w społeczeństwie, poradzili sobie dobrze z zadaniem przeprowadzenia prezydencji i pokazali europejskim partnerom, że są rzetelnym i przewidywalnym partnerem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** prezydencja, Republika Czeska, Unia Europejska, priorytety, integracja europejska.