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## Czech Republic Report

*Vit Dostal*

### 1 | Introduction

The foreign policy of the Czech Republic has not introduced a whole of-government approach (WGA) as a general framework for coping with external conflicts and crises. In fact, official and working foreign policy documents do not even mention one. Officials working in the field of foreign policy planning and security policy who were interviewed for this report said they are aware of the term (or of the terms 'comprehensive approach' and/or 'integrated approach'), and point out that Czech foreign policy coordination mechanisms are indeed designed to fulfil the principle functions of a WGA. A de facto WGA has been introduced in a few cases for which a specific strategy or implementation plan was elaborated. These cases include Afghanistan, Iraq, the Sahel and Syria. The main motivation for introducing a specific strategy has been the need (or desire) of the involved domestic institutional actors to request additional budgetary resources.

From a broader perspective, three things should be noted. First, standard foreign policy coordination in the Czech Republic already involves some mechanisms of a WGA. Second, there are some parallels with a WGA in the country's crisis-management system. And, third, the Czech provincial and reconstruction team that was in Logar, Afghanistan, from 2008 to 2013 as well as recent initiatives related to Iraq, Syria and the Sahel could be perceived as embodying a type of WGA, although there is no mention of this term or a 'comprehensive/integrated approach' in the related documentation.

The constitutional and administrative framework related to foreign policy coordination makes it possible to apply WGA policies to external conflicts and crises. For example, the constitution stipulates that the government has executive power, which also includes responsibility for foreign policy. The key government authority dealing with foreign policy issues is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). However, some instruments for successful WGA efforts are located within other ministries, such as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Ministry of Interior (Mol), which also play a key role in crisis management, as well as the Ministry of Industry and Trade. While foreign policy coordination is performed on the governmental level, coordination of EU affairs is done through the Committee for the European Union and the (similarly named) Committee for the European Union on the Working Level.

Thus, in the Czech constitutional system, the MFA plays the leading role when it comes to foreign engagement. All information on conflict prevention, security, stabilisation, conflict settlement and reconstruction is pooled within the MFA, which usually proposes any subsequent action. In case of a very serious crisis, the government may launch crisis-management efforts, as defined in the act on crisis management (Crisis Management Act 2000). These procedures are well planned and often tested, and they would mobilise a huge amount of human, material and financial resources. Nevertheless, any engagement with a crisis situation would be reactive and expected to be short-term.

## 2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

The Czech Republic has recently made efforts related to responding to external conflicts and crises. For example, a Czech provincial reconstruction team (PRT) served for five years (2008–2013) in Logar, a province in central-eastern Afghanistan, and specific strategies for Iraq and Syria have recently been elaborated. However, the most important related act has been a new initiative regarding the Sahel, which was about to be approved by the government at the time of writing. The initiative, which follows the country's strategy for the region adopted in 2018 (Committee for the European Union 2018), integrates various individual projects that were previously introduced, adds new ones, and is supposed to be provided with special funding.

Despite these actions, strategies and initiatives, Czech policy documents currently make no references to a WGA. Nevertheless, the country's systems for crisis management and foreign policy coordination do include some aspects of a WGA. Below, both systems will be described in more detail and their respective quality will be assessed. After that, the Sahel initiative will be further discussed.

Czech crisis management is conducted according to Act No. 240/2000 (Crisis Management Act 2000). The act stipulates that the government may form a Central Crisis Staff (CCS) as "its own working body for solving crisis situations". The CCS brings together key ministries and other institutions needed to successfully cope with a crisis. If the crisis involves a military threat, the Ministry of Defence presides over the CCS. For all other crises, the Ministry of Interior is responsible for coordinating CCS efforts. The CCS may also deal with an external threat, which leads to a well-coordinated approach to responding to international conflicts and crises.

Crisis-management efforts may only be invoked if there is a direct threat to the state or if there is a military situation that significantly impacts the security interests of the Czech Republic.

These security interests are described and ranked in the country's 2015 security strategy (MFA 2015), where they are categorised as 'vital interests', 'strategic interests' or 'other important interests'.

The comprehensive list covers nearly all security-related interests, from safeguarding the Czech Republic's sovereignty to protecting the environment, which in turn gives the government a free hand to invoke its crisis-management procedures as it sees fit. However, one can hardly imagine that the government would launch such procedures for a conflict or crisis that is in a faraway place or has little impact on the Czech Republic. That said, this may still happen if an allied (NATO and/or EU) country is in danger or when major exercises (e.g. NATO's annual CMX crisis-management exercise) are conducted.

As mentioned above, the Czech crisis-management system is unique in terms of the number of domestic actors involved. However, there are no preventive or follow-up mechanisms in place that would permit one to call its activities 'integrated'. Instead, engagement with crisis situations is reactive, and crisis-management mechanisms are expected to be a short-term. For example, since no set mechanism exists for transitioning from responding to a major crisis to investing in stabilisation efforts, follow-up activities may suffer from departmentalism and a lack of coordination (MoI Interview 2019). In fact, the Czech stance holds that preventive and follow-up policies should be introduced through standard foreign and European policy coordination.

Act No. 2/1969 (Czech National Council 1969) designates the MFA as "the central state authority for the area of foreign policy". As such, the ministry is in charge of preparing foreign policy concepts as well as coordinating humanitarian aid and external economic relations. It also manages the Czech Republic's relations with other countries, international organisations and integration groupings in addition to coordinating all bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Thus, the MFA is responsible for monitoring the situation in conflict regions while instrumentalising embassies or information from international organisations. Furthermore, the MFA manages the country's development assistance, humanitarian aid and transition-promotion programme, which is a financial instrument for fostering democracy. When it comes to external economic relations, the MFA shares responsibilities with the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The MFA's key partner in security issues is the MoD, which is also responsible for Czech international military engagement. Last but not least, the importance of the MoI has risen as the issue of managing international migration has climbed to the top of the political agenda. The MoI also plays a key role in the country's participation in civilian missions. Although there has been a constant clash for competences (mainly with the Ministry of Industry and Trade) and the recent emergence of new actors (e.g. the MoI), the MFA is still the only institution with the capacity to comprehensively follow the developments in conflict regions and propose new actions.

The main authority for foreign policy coordination is the government, and an inter-ministerial comment procedure is in place to facilitate the coherence of its activities. Each ministry may suggest amendments to legislative and non-legislative acts, but the ultimate decision of the government must be followed by all ministries. There is also the National Security Council (NSC) and its committees, which serve as auxiliary authorities and contribute to better policy coherence. The NSC may prepare draft measures for the government aimed at safeguarding the Czech Republic's security.

On the working level, EU-related dossiers are discussed in an inter-ministerial working group and at the Committee for the European Union on the Working Level. Final positions are approved (often just formally) by the Committee for the European Union, which is chaired by the prime minister and de facto mirrors the composition of the government.

Lastly, the initiative related to the Sahel represents what might be called the Czech Republic's first WGA-like policy. The initiative is being introduced as a follow-up in response to a changing international environment, and it also reflects changes in the country's foreign policy interests. This ad hoc application of a WGA brings together a limited number of actors, including the MFA, MoD and Mol. It aims at achieving coherence among and integration of various activities – both those already being conducted in the Sahel region and those planned for the future. Moreover, launching a new, comprehensive programme should result in the allocation of additional financial sources. Indeed, this desire for more funding was openly expressed in an interview with an MFA official while discussing the motivation behind launching the new programme (MFA Interview 2019a).

The prime minister has directly tasked several ministries with preparing such a programme. His motivations are probably twofold – domestic and international. For example, the government has made tackling migration (to the EU) one of its priorities. Since the Sahel is viewed as one of the main sources of illegal migrants to Europe, the government wants to contribute to migration-management efforts in that region. Second, the Czech Republic is one of the EU member states opposed to the reform of the common European asylum system as long as it includes a relocation mechanism with binding quotas. Along with other countries, the Czech Republic is in favour of so-called 'flexible' or 'effective' solidarity, which means that countries unwilling to accept asylum seekers should be active in other areas of migration management. Enhanced Czech involvement in the Sahel could be perceived as an example of an activity that aligns with the 'effective solidarity' logic.

### 3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?

The actors involved in WGA-like activities in the Czech Republic vary depending upon the nature of the issue demanding their attention. For example, in the case of foreign policy coordination, the main source of information on the conflict regions is the respective territorial department. The department collects information from the embassies, international organisations, other ministries, civil administration actors and NGOs.

If action is required, it may occur in two kinds of situations. First, if a conflict or crisis is about to be discussed in an international organisation (e.g. the EU, NATO, the OSCE or the UN), a national position is prepared (or, more often, merely updated). The position is drafted by the department and is discussed in the ministerial collegium comprising the minister and all deputy ministers, and then it is forwarded to the inter-ministerial level.

On the other hand, if the issue is security-related, it is usually also discussed on the National Security Council or its Committee on Coordination of Foreign and Security Policy. This committee is chaired by the deputy minister of foreign affairs and comprises the deputy ministers from various ministries, the directors of the intelligence services, and directors of

other institutions. While it has 20 members, the National Security Council chaired by the prime minister has only nine members: the minister of the interior (serving as deputy chairman) as well as the ministers of defence, foreign affairs, finance, industry and trade, transport, health and agriculture. The president may also attend NSC meetings.

If the issue is one that will be discussed in the Council of the EU or the European Council, it is part of the European policy coordination mechanism. In this case, the draft position is first debated in the inter-ministerial working group, which brings together all relevant ministries represented (usually on the level of department directors). Second, the issue is discussed on the Committee for the European Union on the Working Level, which is presided over by the state secretary for European affairs and includes deputy ministers responsible for the EU agenda. The final national position is adopted on the Committee for the European Union, which is chaired by the prime minister and mirrors the composition of the government.

Any ministry may also suggest its own activity, such as delivering special humanitarian aid or development assistance. Since these cases usually have budgetary implications, they must be discussed on the governmental level. The government has to adopt a decision that tasks individual ministries and usually dedicates extra financial resources for the initiative.

If a crisis-management effort is launched, the Central Crisis Staff (CCS) is formed. The CCS has 16 members, comprising representatives of several ministries and other authorities (e.g. the General Staff, the fire rescue service and the police). All institutions involved in the crisis-management effort have clear instructions to be followed depending on the specific type of crisis situation.

The Czech Republic's specific initiative regarding the Sahel has brought together three ministries: those of Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Interior. The MFA serves as the de facto coordinator, as the standard mechanism for foreign policy coordination is applied in this case. Moreover, it is responsible for humanitarian aid and development assistance, and it was also tasked with opening a new embassy in the region. The MoD is part of the initiative because Czech troops have participated in the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (UN MINUSMA). The MoI provides civilian experts and has incorporated the region into the national Medical Humanitarian Programme (MEDEVAC). Coordination is done on the level of department directors and is generally less formal. The drafting of a new initiative, which is supposed to follow on the strategy adopted in 2018, has been done in a small team comprising MFA, MoD and MoI officials. However, since they were tasked with preparing a new initiative by the prime minister and since there are budgetary implications, the new strategy has to be formally adopted by the government and the respective governmental decision must be issued.

#### **4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?**

In both general and specific cases (e.g. the Sahel initiative), the Czech WGA is operationalised through standard processes of foreign or European policy coordination.

The MFA is responsible for foreign policy coordination. In this case, the respective territorial department plays the role of a key operational enabler, as it collects all relevant information on

the crisis region. If an international organisation has asked for Czech engagement, the department is the first actor to voice an opinion on it. It may also informally contact other relevant actors, such as other ministries or NGOs. Then, the Czech position is debated at the MFA's collegium, where the minister of foreign affairs voices his or her support or opposition to it.

If the issue needs to be discussed with any other ministries, additional coordination is necessary. The EU-related dossiers would need to be discussed in the inter-ministerial working group and the Committee for the European Union on the Working Level, and then adopted or rejected by the Committee for the European Union.

If it is not necessary to follow the European policy coordination procedure, a standard inter-ministerial comment procedure is followed. In this case, the MFA sends a proposal to the comment procedure, receives replies and then deals with any criticisms of the proposed position. In this phase, settling objections can be less formal on the bureaucratic level and involve high-ranking officials, in which case it may become more political in nature.

Unless absolutely necessary, the MFA usually tries to avoid using comprehensive coordination mechanisms. However, it is obliged to do so when the European coordination mechanism is involved. This happens quite often, in fact, as conflict regions are usually discussed at meetings of the European Council and, of course, of the EU's Foreign Affairs Council.

However, the MFA is motivated to put the issues on the governmental level if its initiative related to the conflict or crisis requires additional budgetary resources. In these cases, the Ministry of Finance is usually the main disabler since it is rarely willing to release additional funds, and the prime minister assumes the role of the enabler. This has also been the case when it comes to the Sahel initiative. And since the prime minister has his own political motivations (as discussed above regarding migration and asylum) for the initiative to be launched and for the WGA to be applied, it is likely that extra funding will be provided.

## 5 | Conclusions

Although a WGA to external conflicts and crises is not explicitly mentioned in Czech foreign policy documents, it is implemented in practice. Interviewed officials from the MFA have stated that there are WGAs to countries like Ukraine or those in the Western Balkans region, but that there is no specific, detailed 'umbrella' strategy under which all initiatives could be placed. Moreover, they also stated that they do not see a need to change this approach, as this de facto WGA works well under standard foreign policy coordination mechanisms. When asked about potentially launching more robust WGA mechanisms, the MFA officials interviewed for this report voiced worries about a possible over-bureaucratisation of policy coordination and did not see added value in it in any case (MFA Interview 2019a, 2019b).

There are special mechanisms for crisis settlement within the Czech crisis-management system. These procedures are well developed and regularly tested during both national and international exercises. However, in reality, crisis-management efforts would only be launched were there to be a larger international conflict with significant implications for the security of the Czech Republic.

Nevertheless, one can identify some cases of WGA implementation in a narrower sense. The first such initiative was the Czech provincial reconstruction team that served in the Logar province of Afghanistan from 2008 to 2013 as part of the NATO-led ISAF mission. This is generally viewed as having been a significant achievement (MFA Interview 2019b). The main factors contributing to its success were political determination and the non-conflictual relations between the actors on the ground, which were the MFA and MoD.

Another WGA-like initiative is the relatively new Czech engagement in the Sahel region. It is not possible to evaluate the initiative at this point, as it only started in 2018 and because the application of a WGA in this case is still a quite new phenomenon. However, it is clear that political interests and the personal priorities of the prime minister were key motivations for launching it.

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