

MINUTES FROM THE MEETING OF THE HIGHEST CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICIALS ON FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS

On 29 September 2020, the President of the Czech Republic, the President (Speaker) of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defense and the Minister of the Interior met at the Lány Chateau to, in particular, discuss the following foreign policy issues:

COVID-19 and international impacts

The highest constitutional officials discussed the serious and ongoing situation relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, they called upon Czech nationals to take a responsible approach. The impacts of the pandemic are felt in almost all areas of our lives; foreign policy has been affected as well, including restrictions on the external activities of the Czech Republic's senior representatives. The highest constitutional officials discussed the ways in which the pandemic may affect the position of the Czech Republic in international relations. They agreed that the pandemic did not bring any new trends into the already changing international environment; rather, it intensified and accelerated some of the existing ones. One of the main trends is further weakening of confidence among key actors, and growing pressure for reform of international multilateral institutions. Multilateral, regional and cross-border cooperation will remain an important part of international relations even in the post-pandemic era, which means that it must reflect our recent experience from times of crisis including, for example, the growth of tensions between solidarity and national interests.

The prosperity of the Czech Republic has been based on the openness of its economy and its anchoring in the community of countries that share the values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The pandemic has demonstrated the vulnerability of open economies; accordingly, the highest constitutional officials support the building of the Czech Republic's resilience in key areas with an emphasis on ensuring the security of the Czech Republic, including in the context of the structuring of global supply chains and economic relations in general. The highest constitutional officials regard the building of resilience as a concept that makes it possible to reduce the risks inherent in an open economy. They note that this aspect also has a geopolitical dimension, and that it requires the strengthening of cooperation between countries sharing the same values, especially within the EU and NATO but also in relation to other partners with the same value base. At the same time, the highest constitutional officials emphasise the need for public investment and the efficiency of public spending under the European Recovery Plan.

Because the pandemic can bring serious social and economic problems, the Czech Republic should strive to use all possible tools not only at the domestic level, but also resources and experience at the international level to minimize the impact on the population, especially more vulnerable groups such as low-income, seniors or recent graduates.

In conclusion, the highest constitutional officials noted that, in many respects, the ongoing pandemic represents an opportunity, and a chance, to streamline bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

Defence and security

The present global economic downturn, unprecedented since the end of WWII, generates new uncertainties. The highest constitutional officials note that one of the prerequisites for

economic confidence and growth is a secure and stable environment. They consider it necessary to ensure that the Czech Republic remains one of the world's most secure countries. Since internal and external aspects of security are closely intertwined, the highest constitutional officials consider it necessary to continue fostering both our national security and the security of our Allies, namely by developing our capability to bring into play diverse tools (diplomatic, military and security tools as well as those relating to economy and development), which also includes the capability to provide the necessary resources to this end. This will hinge on our compliance with the existing NATO commitment to achieve spending two per cent of our GDP on defence by 2024. The highest constitutional officials continue to support this objective and expect that compliance will result in significant enhancement and modernisation of the capabilities of our armed forces in which the Czech defence and security industry will have an important role to play. In addition to defense spending, the highest constitutional officials consider it necessary to increase spending on internal security, primarily through investments in the development of Czech Police Forces, the Integrated Rescue System, cyber security and the fight against illegal migration. One of the key priorities is to contribute to the struggle against terrorism including operational deployment, above all, in Afghanistan, in the Middle East and in the Sahel region (operation TAKUBA/BARKHANE/training mission EUTM Mali). The highest constitutional officials regard the “together in, together out” principle as the crucial aspect of each of these operations.

EU neighbourhood (Belarus, South of Europe, Nagorno-Karabakh, new Middle East agreements, JCPOA/Iran)

The highest constitutional officials agreed that security and stability in Europe's neighbourhood is integral to Europe's own security. European history has shown that enduring stability, security and prosperity depend on democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Therefore, the highest constitutional officials expressed their fundamental concern over the developments in Belarus where the voters had been denied their right to freely and fairly choose their own representatives. The Czech Republic supports the aspirations to achieve immediate re-counting of August election ballots under independent scrutiny and, subsequently, holding of new free and fair elections with the participation of all nominated candidates and under the international observation. At the same time, the highest constitutional officials noted that it was unacceptable to respond to peaceful civic protests with repressions resulting in dead, injured and missing people, and expressed their support for the EU sanctions that make this unacceptability clear. The closed-door ceremony of Alexander Lukashenko's inauguration as the President of Belarus, which took place in violation of the constitution and the will of the Belarusian people, does not give Alexander Lukashenko democratic legitimacy. The Czech Republic will continue to support the development of civil society, and especially of independent media, in Belarus. Such support cannot be perceived as interference in the country's domestic political situation.

The highest constitutional officials were briefed on the current development in the Eastern Mediterranean. They expressed concern over the escalation of the situation and called on all sides to negotiate and solve the dispute in accordance with international law.

The highest constitutional officials were also informed of the current situation in Nagorno-Karabakh, where the bloodiest clashes since spring 2016 are undergoing. They expressed deep regret over the number of victims and agreed that a large-scale military offensive must end. The highest constitutional officials urge both sides to put an immediate end to the

aggravated situation that threatens the civilian population and to seek a sustainable solution only through diplomatic negotiations.

The highest constitutional officials highly appreciated the Israel-United Arab Emirates and Israel-Bahrain agreements which have the potential to fundamentally change the present destabilising dynamics and pave the way for cooperation and security in the region. Therefore, the highest constitutional officials believe that starting and continuing this trend is the crucial step that may secure the success of the Israeli-Palestinian direct unconditional negotiations and fulfill our priorities, including further strengthening our representation in Jerusalem.

The highest constitutional officials expressed their fundamental concern over Iran's continuing activities in the nuclear, non-proliferation and regional dimensions. The Czech Republic continues to support the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) as a way to deal with some of these activities; to achieve this, it is necessary to promptly address Iran's continuing breaches of JCPOA commitments. Moreover, the Czech Republic supports all activities helping maintain the effects of the UN arms embargo that is to expire in the near future as foreseen in the JCPOA.

Czech-Russian relations

The highest constitutional officials confirmed that the Czech Republic is interested to conduct a constructive and meaningful dialogue with Russia, naturally reflecting the way in which our values are anchored in European and Euro-Atlantic structures as well as the way in which Russia treats the interests of such structures and allies. The aim of the planned consultations is to restore correct bilateral relations and standard diplomatic communication with the Russian Federation. The consultations should provide an opportunity for a matter-of-fact debate on a broad range of topics relevant to mutual relations, including resolution of the most acute bilateral problems, and the Czech side is ready for this. However, this process cannot be unilateral. The highest constitutional officials expect that in this respect, the interests of the Russian side will be the same as those of the Czech Republic.

China

The highest constitutional officials reaffirmed that the Czech Republic implemented its One China policy without any change, and that it insisted on the standard diplomatic communication associated with such policy. The development of relations with China, based on joint statement on the strategic partnership from 2016 and mutual respect and benefit as well as on respect for the other party's sovereignty, is in the Czech Republic's interest and the visit to Taiwan by the President of the Senate cannot be perceived as any change to this policy. The highest constitutional officials pointed out that one of the elements of our One China policy is our interest to further deepen the benefits of our relations with Taiwan in the areas of economy, science and research or culture, and that they did not regard such interest as interfering with the diplomatic contacts with Beijing.

V4

The highest constitutional officials symbolically concluded the Czech V4 Presidency and expressed their full support for the current Polish V4 Presidency and its ambitions summed up in the motto "Back on Track". The pandemic crisis has demonstrated i.a. the importance of

regional cooperation formats such as the V4 which offer the flexible mechanisms so much needed in difficult situations.

EU, preparations for CZ EU PRES 2020

The highest constitutional officials follow with concern the current development of negotiations on the free trade agreement between the United Kingdom and the EU. In this context, they are closely following the unfavorable political developments in the United Kingdom, including the British Government's intention to breach the so-called withdrawal agreement concluded between the EU and the United Kingdom at the end of last year. Such a move would clearly constitute a fundamental breach of international law and would further jeopardize the possibilities for future cooperation, including reaching an agreement on future relations. In this connection they noted that they still believed that a compromise could be found to prevent Hard Brexit at the end of this year. However, at the same time they urge that Czech companies should prepare for all possible scenarios, and that Czech nationals permanently resident in the United Kingdom should apply for the settled status before the end of the grace period. The highest constitutional officials emphasized that no matter how Brexit turned out, it would be crucial to maintain a strong security and defense cooperation link between the EU and the United Kingdom.

The highest constitutional officials expressed their appreciation for the manner in which Croatia, in its capacity as EU Presidency, coped with the complicated situation in the first half of this year, which again showed that small and medium sized countries are able to perform the EU Presidency role successfully and effectively and this fact has a positive impact on their reputation in the EU. The highest constitutional officials underlined their full support for the current German EU Presidency, including especially the effort to forge a timely agreement on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for the coming period.

The highest constitutional officials were briefed on the progress of preparations for the Czech EU Presidency scheduled for the second half of 2022, and they fully support the ambition to organise a number of events, including at the top-level, in the Czech Republic. The highest constitutional officials noted that the Presidency offers a unique opportunity to raise the Czech Republic's profile and promote also its own long-term priorities including some new topics. The highest constitutional officials noted with appreciation that in this connection the Government has already approved a document concerning the Starting Points for Priorities of the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The highest constitutional officials were informed by the Prime Minister on the talks of the V4 representatives with the EC President, in particular on the proposed document on the change of migration and asylum policy, and fully support the position expressed by the Prime Minister.