Unwilling to Succeed: The Czech Position on US Missile Defense – Between Strategy and Public Political Debate

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Background

After the fall of Communism in 1989, one of the main goals of Czechoslovak, and later Czech, foreign policy, was to become a member of Western security, economic, and political structures. It was not long after the Velvet Revolution that the Czechs rejected "neutrality" and began to strive for NATO membership. This pro-Atlantic position was not only a strategic choice, but also a natural reaction to forty years of living under the Soviet sphere of influence. In light of this historical experience, it was hoped that the United States, rather than West European countries, would provide security guarantees not only to the Czech Republic, but to the whole Central and Eastern Europe region. This aspiration culminated in 1999 when the Czech Republic, together with Hungary and Poland, joined NATO.

In 2006, the US announced a plan to deploy ballistic missile defense interceptors in Europe as part of the George W. Bush administration's policy for advancing missile defense. In 2007, the Czech Republic and Poland were invited to participate in this plan by deploying US military infrastructure on their territory; ten interceptors would be deployed in Poland and a missile tracking radar in the Czech Republic. The interceptors were to be two-stage versions of the three-stage GBIs, and the radar an X-band radar. The European site of the ballistic missile defense would be part of a system that was intended to defend both the US and parts of Europe from potential future Iranian long-range ballistic missiles.

The participation of the Czech Republic in the US Missile Defense System (MDS) was seen by the proponents of the project as an opportunity

to send a clear signal that the Czech Republic was now fully integrated into the Western political sphere. Moreover, it would convey that the country was shifting from the role of a passive consumer of the security guarantees to that of an actively involved actor that also provides security to others. The Atlanticists saw the MDS as a further step toward strengthening the alliance with the US. They believed that the presence of American military infrastructure on Czech territory would upgrade the role of the Czech Republic as an important strategic asset for the US and thus strengthen the security guarantee provided by the United States. The presence of the US army in the Czech Republic and Poland would also, in their opinion, contribute to the fairer distribution of US military assets over Europe, which did not happen after the enlargement of NATO in 1999 and 2004, and serve as an ultimate security guarantee against Russia. In addition, they saw the presence of a hi-tech project in the Czech Republic as a promising opportunity for Czech scientists and entrepreneurs.

The talks about Czech participation in the MDS, however, took place in a rather different political atmosphere, both in the Czech Republic and internationally, than the atmosphere when the Czechs negotiated their membership in NATO. Their participation was discussed on two levels: the technical and, subsequently, the political. The first technical consultations started in 2002 under the government led by the center-left Social Democratic Party.[1] In September 2002, Minister of Defense Jaroslav Tvrdík visited Washington and confirmed his readiness to facilitate negotiations concerning the deployment of the US anti-missile defense program on Czech soil.[2] For the next four years, negotiations continued behind closed doors. As they were handled as mainly technical and diplomatic issues, any political, public, or expert-level debate was almost entirely missing. This situation was, however, about to change.

Czech parliamentary elections in June 2006 resulted in a total political stalemate. Both the left and center-left camp and the center and center-right camp won 100 seats in the Parliament. The center-right Civic Democratic Party won the highest number of seats and thus earned the mandate to form a government. It built a coalition together with the Christian Democrats and the Greens. Yet in order to obtain parliamentary approval, it needed the support of at least one member of either the Social Democratic Party or the Communist Party. Finally, on January 19, 2007, two members of the Social Democrats abstained, thus allowing the coalition to win the vote of

confidence needed to form the government. This vote caused an uproar among the Social Democrats, who accused the coalition of bribing their members. It was on the very same date of this critical vote that the US officially asked the Czech Republic to participate in the MDS by hosting the radar base on its territory, and thus, at this most divisive moment, the MDS became part of the Czech domestic political debate.

The Civic Democrats, with a strong group of Atlanticists, supported Czech participation. The Christian Democrats were also in favor, although some of its members in the Parliament did not hide their pacifistic inclinations and reserve regarding the MDS. It was, however, mainly the Green Party that contributed to the lack of unity in the coalition. Most of the ministers from the Green Party were not against the MDS but promoted its multilateralization. The Green Party leadership and the majority of members, on the other hand, rejected the project entirely. The Social Democrats used the MDS to position themselves against the government and, in particular, their main rival, the Civic Democrats. The Communists, for their part, opposed any kind of US presence on Czech territory.

With negotiations having been long kept out of public view and without any debate in the Parliament, Czech citizens, as well as the broader community of experts, lacked information. Debate, therefore, should have been encouraged. Since the Czech Republic entered NATO, foreign policy topics appeared only marginally in the domestic debate. The MDS thus provided an opportunity to discuss a geopolitical project in which the Czech Republic might play a role. The public could have been exposed to a debate that concerned national interest, foreign policy strategy, and the Czech contribution to international security. However, rather than being conducted in a politically constructive style, the debate took place in a highly politicized and divisive atmosphere. Due to domestic political instability, the arguments in favor or against Czech involvement were presented in a very simplistic, ideological, and often even demagogic manner.

This article argues that the key actors on both the domestic and international levels contributed to the atmosphere in which it became largely impossible to reach a national consensus and broad acceptance of the MDS. The aim is not to analyze the MDS project, but rather to examine the Czech domestic political debate and the impact of external players, mainly the US and Russia, on both the Czech political leadership and the public.

Public Opinion

The MDS was publicly discussed only when it became part of a domestic political struggle during 2006 and 2007. According to a public opinion poll from July 2006, 83 percent of Czechs were against participation in the MDS.[3] The main reason given was the fear of exposing the Czech Republic to the potential revenge of terrorists. Among respondents, the number of those against the MDS increased with age (the largest group of opponents being aged fifty and above). Having experienced the twenty-year presence of Soviet troops, they did not view US military presence as a security guarantee, but rather as a limit to their national sovereignty. A year later, when it became clear that the Czechs would be asked to host not rockets but a radar base, a survey run by the American Opinion Research Corporation showed that a majority of Czechs were still not convinced: about 51 percent objected to a radar base on Czech soil and 57 percent rejected the idea that the radar would strengthen the security of their country.[4]

Two researchers from the Institute of International Relations in Prague, Hynek and Střítecký, analyzed the main arguments of those who were against the radar.[5] They found that opponents considered the US a foreign power looking to impose its will over the Czech Republic. They also discarded the idea of a common enemy and blamed the US for spreading fear by talking about "paranoiac theories about the Iranian threat." Furthermore, arguments were advanced that the US and the Czech Republic do not share the same values and are not part of the same alliance, and therefore need not necessarily be protected under the same umbrella.

Various polls repeatedly showed a majority complaining about the lack of information. Those who were better informed tended to be more supportive. Therefore, in March 2007, the Czech government created the position of a special representative, whose task was to conduct negotiations on the radar base and to develop and coordinate a comprehensive public communications strategy. This position was highly problematic from the very outset. First, it was not clear what kind of a mandate this representative had. The parliamentary opposition criticized the government for sending the special representative instead of talking directly to the mayors of the cities and villages close to the intended radar base.[6] Second, the position of special representative was given to Tomáš Klvaňa, a rather controversial figure known to the public as a lobbyist for the multinational British American Tobacco, a post he kept even while serving as the special representative. As one Czech diplomat

mentioned, it was rather counterproductive when Klvaňa, wearing a tailor-made suit and driving a luxury car, came to negotiate with mayors in the economically struggling region where the US radar base was to be built.

And indeed, the government did not succeed in convincing the representatives of these regions. During 2008, representatives of both Western Bohemia and Central Bohemia voted against hosting the US radar base unless it was approved in a referendum.[7] They were supported mainly by the Social Democratic and Communist regional representatives. Even though these decisions were only declarative and bore no legal weight, they expressed general reluctance toward the radar, which was reflected in another public survey at the end of 2008 showing that most Czechs did not agree with hosting the radar base on Czech soil. In this survey, two thirds of the respondents were against and 28 percent were in favor; 71 percent were in favor of a referendum.[8] Most of those against the radar were Social Democrat and Communist voters.

The Czech government, efforts notwithstanding, clearly did not succeed in convincing the majority of Czechs. As observed by Hynek and Střítecký, the American idea of the MDS was communicated to Czech governmental representatives who internalized it and subsequently presented it as a national interest. Yet, the MDS never became a national interest in a true sense. The merging between governmental interest and public interest never took place; rather they collided.[9]

The Role of the Czech Government

In March 2007, the Czech government officially entered into negotiations with the US on the deployment of an American X-Band radar base in the Czech Republic. The Czech government adopted the American raison d'être for building an anti-missile defense system in Europe. In June 2007, the US Missile Defense Agency published a document called "Proposed U.S. Missile Defense Assets in Europe." This document defined the main threats (rogue states, mainly North Korea and Iran, and ballistic missile proliferation); detailed the benefits of ballistic missile defense for Europe (enhanced collective security of the NATO Alliance, strengthening of transatlantic unity, and technology sharing); and stressed that the prospective US missile defense assets deployed in Europe were not directed at Russia but aimed to provide defensive coverage against threats coming from the Middle East.[10] The Czech government did not prepare tailor-made documents that would

reflect the Czech national interest in participating in the MDS; rather, it embraced the American arguments.

This lack of any Czech-made strategic document proved to be problematic. The Czech public, as shown in various public opinion surveys, never became convinced that the Czech Republic should be an active participant in the MDS. For many Czechs, apparently, the MDS symbolized a US projection of power rather than a defensive tool against threats emanating from the Middle East. Similarly, the debate among Czech political leaders was more about the pros and cons of a US presence on Czech soil than the impact of the MDS on global security.

Missing Domestic Political Consensus

Another major reason for the lack of public support for the MDS was the lack of political consensus. The government itself was weakened by the ambiguous position of the Green Party. For the first time in their history, the Czech Greens won seats in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Due to the results that divided the number of parliamentary seats equally between the left and the right, the Greens' negotiating position was very strong. With only six members in the Parliament, they managed to obtain four ministerial seats in the government. However, their lack of political experience and ideological ambivalence became apparent during the debate about the MDS.

In general, the Greens opposed the foreign policy of George W. Bush and specifically its perceived unilateral character. The MDS should not, they argued, be a bilateral project between the Czech Republic and the US, but rather should become part of the NATO anti-missile defense system. When the government adopted this perspective and started to actively promote "NATO-ization" of the MDS, the Greens put other demands on the table.

The government approved the main treaty on the building of a US radar base on Czech soil in May 2008 (one of the ministers from the Green Party abstained, three voted in favor). The treaty was then subject to approval (by a simple majority) by the Parliament. The Green Party demanded postponement of the vote until after the US presidential elections in November 2008, arguing that more time was needed for an internal debate. They maintained that a vote should take place only after the missile defense agenda of the new administration was clear.[11] Some Green MPs, with strong support from within the party leadership, kept rejecting the MDS outright.[12] In order to be ratified by the Parliament, all coalition parties needed to vote in favor

of the treaty, with one additional vote needed from the opposition. The Social Democrats, however, became hesitant. For years, negotiations had mainly taken place behind the closed doors of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The public was thus largely unaware that it was governments led by the Social Democrats that first negotiated with the US about the MDS. Therefore, the Social Democrats, out of concern for any political loss caused by proving inconsistent, used the radar for political bargaining with the coalition. They placed a set of demands as the precondition for their support, including the integration of the MDS into NATO structures and a national referendum about Czech participation in the project.

For the government negotiators, however, the situation was complicated even further by the unclear position of Jiří Paroubek, chairman of the Social Democrats. According to one diplomat talking confidentially with the American negotiators, while Paroubek was quite supportive of Czech participation in the MDS, when addressing the Czech public, he took a very populist approach. In 2008, with the culmination of the debate about the radar, Paroubek warned Social Democrat MPs against voting in favor if they wanted to hold onto their positions on the subsequent party list.[13] He also promised to support the protest activities organized by the NGO *Ne zakládnám* (No to the Bases), the most vocal and visible organization against the radar.[14]

The domestic political confrontation both within the government and between the government and the opposition made a serious, non-ideological debate impossible. This lack of domestic consensus thus weakened the government's mandate to negotiate both the technical and political aspects of the treaty with the US government.

Multilateralization

The US MDS was originally planned as a bilateral project between the US and the Czech Republic and the US and Poland, respectively. Yet as the negotiations gained momentum, the demand for multilateralization grew in the Czech Republic.[15] Hence, in late 2007, the Czech government started to promote the so-called "NATO-ization" of the MDS. Poland, on the other hand, continued to support the bilateral nature of the project.

Most European NATO members did not oppose the MDS in principle. However, since NATO had been working on its own anti-missile project (Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defense [ALTBMD]), there was

concern that by supporting the MDS in Europe the Bush administration was looking to bypass collective agreements. The US administration did, in fact, emphasize its desire to keep its European MDS infrastructure outside of the NATO command structure.[16] Some European NATO members were also upset about being excluded from the negotiations about the project, which affected more than just the Czech Republic and Poland. One of the main concerns was that the MDS would not defend all European NATO members (particularly Southeast European countries), which would breach the principle of collective security. Opponents also raised the question of the potential impact of radioactive debris over Europe should a nuclear missile be shot down by the system.

In addition, the EU was disturbed that it had not been consulted on US plans that would affect European security and relations with third countries, mainly Russia.[17] However, the lack of an EU collective strategy regarding the anti-ballistic program and the negative approach of some EU members to the MDS in general contributed to skepticism about the ability of the EU to play any constructive role in this project. Nonetheless, by not consulting with the EU, the Czech Republic missed the opportunity to maintain a stronger position on the question of the European security agenda. It is evident that neither the Czech nor the American negotiators paid enough attention to other relevant actors, mainly other NATO members and the EU, and consequently, when the Czech government, with US backing, aimed for the "NATO-ization" of the MDS, it encountered resistance from some members.

Czech and American negotiators hoped to gather support for the MDS at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. Czech diplomats admitted that the negotiations at the summit were far from easy. Germany and Slovakia, both neighboring countries, were particularly opposed to the deployment of US missile defense assets in Europe out of concern for the Russian reaction. The NATO members finally agreed to recognize the contribution of European-based US missile defense assets to the protection of NATO allies from long range ballistic missiles.[18] The final summit declaration also stated that NATO would explore ways to make the MDS part of any future NATO-wide missile defense architecture, but fell short of the actual incorporation of the MDS. The project was now, however, officially recognized as beneficial to European security.

The Role of the United States

The plan to deploy US missile defense capability in Europe, which was promoted by the administration of George W. Bush − whose disdain for international institutions and whose "war on terror" agenda had become rather unpopular − faced growing resentment in Europe. While this antipathy was stronger among the political left in Western Europe, it also had some impact on Czech center-left parties as well as the general public. The bilateral nature of the negotiations, which for some time excluded third countries, only strengthened the feeling that the Bush administration was paying no attention to collective agreements and was thus undermining multilateral forums.

The Americans, for their part, had expected negotiations about the technical parameters of the MDS and were therefore caught unprepared when the topic became politicized both on the domestic level in the Czech Republic as well as in NATO and the EU. Nor were the bilateral negotiations between the Czech Republic and the US free from diplomatic faux pas. While visiting Prague in October 2007, Minister of Defense Robert Gates accidentally leaked information about negotiations with the Russians, to whom the Americans had apparently offered the option of placing Russian observers at the US radar site in the Czech Republic. To Czechs, who still had vivid memories of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, the fact that Americans had negotiated a Russian presence on Czech soil without informing them was unacceptable. The step was strongly condemned even by MDS proponents in the Czech Republic.[19]

As the negotiations entered their final stage, it became clear that even in the US the project did not have clear support from Congress. In both the House and the Senate there were doubts concerning the realistic capabilities of the MDS in its current stage. Moreover, the Democrats criticized the Bush administration for insufficient coordination with NATO.[20] This lack of Congressional support manifested itself in budget cuts. For the fiscal year 2009, the Bush administration requested $712 million for financing the European part of the missile defense, but the House Armed Services Committee agreed to provide only $314 million for the proposed sites in the Czech Republic and Poland. The Committee expressed its doubts concerning the effectiveness of the project based on the results of program testing, showed concern about the lack of ratified agreements with the Czech Republic and Poland, and raised doubts, based on a new analysis by

the American intelligence agencies, concerning the estimated pace of the Iranian long range missile program.[21]

As Bush's second presidential term drew to an end, the future of the MDS became unclear. During his presidential campaign, Senator Obama supported the ballistic missile defenses, provided they were operationally effective.[22] This position contributed to feelings of uncertainty about the determination of the Democratic presidential candidate, if elected, to continue with the MDS in Europe. Some Czech politicians started to doubt whether it was worth risking their political capital by supporting an unpopular project that might be dropped by the new administration. The ratification process was therefore slowed in order to assess the impact of the presidential election results on the MDS.

The Role of Russia

The Russian reaction to the MDS in Central Europe reflected its trauma from the years of the Cold War. It also proved that after years in decline, Russia was once again determined to promote its interest in its European neighborhood. The NATO presence at its western border epitomized to the Russians both a threat and a reminder of its own weakness. The two rounds of NATO enlargement, in 1999 and 2004, took place when Russian power was on the wane and presented no challenge to the West. The announcement of the MDS in Europe came at the very same time that President Putin decided to revive the status of Russia as a country whose interests must be taken into consideration.

Russia applied various tools in order to prevent the deployment of the US anti-missile system in the Czech Republic and Poland. On the diplomatic scene, President Putin did not refrain from using very harsh language. At the Munich Security Conference in February 2007, he claimed that the MDS in Europe would lead to "an inevitable arms race";[23] on another occasion he compared US plans in Europe to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.[24] Furthermore, Russia threatened to transfer medium range ballistic missiles to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, and even indicated that these new weapons might target the US sites in the Czech Republic and Poland.[25]

On a strategic level, Russia did not accept the argument that the MDS was aimed at the Iranian threat. Instead, Russia argued that the reason for placing the radar in the Czech Republic was to monitor Russian military sites, and the interceptors planned for Poland were to serve as deterrents

against Russia's missile arsenal.[26] By being so vehemently opposed to the MDS in Europe, Putin hoped, and partially succeeded, to fuel discord among NATO and EU members. Fear of the Russian reaction and of the possible deployment of ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad contributed to the cautious approach of some toward the US project.[27]

It was in the domain of public diplomacy where Russia managed to gain substantial influence over the public discourse in the Czech Republic. As mentioned above, American negotiators, together with their Czech counterparts, considered Czech participation in the MDS a technical issue and were not well prepared for the public discussion. Russia, on the other hand, recognized all too well the potential of strong public disagreement over the radar on the position of the Czech government. This was the first time since the Cold War that Russia became so heavily involved in the Czech domestic debate.[28]

Russian involvement manifested itself on various levels. First, by threatening to use force against the facility itself, they managed to raise fear among some Czechs.[29] Second, the Russian argument that the MDS in Europe was actually aimed against Russia was adopted by many Czech opponents of the project. Some pro-radar Czech politicians argued along similar lines and maintained that Russian threats proved that US presence on Czech soil was actually the best guarantee against Russian expansionism. In this way, the Russian tactic of rerouting the debate from the Czech contribution to NATO security to the old Cold War East-West discourse proved successful. Third, Russia helped to galvanize public opinion against the radar. The most prominent initiative against the radar was the organization *Ne základnám* (No to the Bases). Founded in June 2006, this initiative managed to unite a range of heterogeneous groups that opposed the radar. Noam Chomsky, the prominent linguist from MIT, and some well-known Czech intellectuals joined the initiative, an umbrella organization of sixty different organizations including Young Socialists, Young Greens, Union of Muslim Students in the Czech Republic, and the International Peace Movement.[30]

*Ne z*ákladnám became active in all regions of the Czech Republic. It organized public rallies, distributed leaflets, advertised on billboards, and collected 150,000 signatures on a petition demanding a nationwide referendum. The initiative argued that rather than serve American interests, the Czech Republic, with its history of Soviet occupations, should now remain neutral and serve as a bridge between the West and Russia. It became the most visible

operation dealing with the issue of radar and one of the most successful public initiatives in the Czech Republic to date.[31] Its massive campaign, especially the billboards, required strong financial backing. Russian involvement has not, as yet, been officially proved, but Czech TV did report on the Russian secret service's financial contribution to the campaign, basing their claims on an annual report of the military intelligence and counter-intelligence service of the Czech Republic.[32] While this was never officially confirmed, Russian clandestine involvement became a widely accepted unofficial fact.

Supporters of the radar did not initiate a similar campaign. The governmental effort was promoted by their special representative, Klvaňa. American tactics were more discrete. For example, Czech MPs were taken to the Marshall Islands where they could visit the radar planned for the Czech radar base. Yet, this was no match for the well-organized and visible campaign against the radar. Moreover, due to the nature of *Ne základnám*, it was easy get the impression that whereas the MDS was only supported by part of the Czech political representation, the anti-campaign was a truly grassroots movement.

The Obama Administration

On assuming office, President Obama inherited from his predecessor an array of "unfinished" foreign policy business. It was clear to Obama that in order to deal with the conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, solve the Iranian nuclear program issue, redefine the war on terror, and promote nonproliferation, he would need the support of both European allies as well as Russia. The announcement of the "reset" policy with Russia raised concern among the CEE countries, especially due to growing speculation that President Obama had offered to Russian President Medvedev to stop the deployment of the missile defense program in Europe on condition that Russia cooperate with the US in its efforts to halt Iran's nuclear program.[33] While the US administration denied the existence of such a quid pro quo, it became clear from his communication with Medvedev that for Obama, the MDS in Europe was not about strengthening US presence in the CEE but was part of a broader US foreign policy strategy that was about to be redefined. Multilateralism, rather than unilateral or bilateral actions, would be the preferred strategy.

Obama's plans concerning the MDS in Europe were not, however, immediately apparent. In the first half of 2009, the Czech Republic held the Presidency of the Council of the EU, and Obama planned to visit the

EU-US summit in Prague. Czech negotiators hoped that by arranging a meeting between Obama and Paroubek, the head of the opposition Social Democratic Party, the opposition leader would change his mind and support the treaty concerning the building of the radar base.[34] Yet at this very sensitive moment, domestic political instability manifested itself once again. Only a few days before Obama's visit to Prague, there was a vote of no confidence in the Czech Parliament. The fragile coalition lost this motion after four of its MPs (two from the Civic Democratic Party and two former members of the Green Party) voted against the government. The fall of the government during the EU presidency, shortly before the EU-US summit hosted by Prague, and at a time when the Czechs were negotiating with the new US administration, significantly weakened the Czech position and raised doubts about the predictability and seriousness of the Czech political leadership in general.

However, it was Obama and his administration that had the final say about the future of the MDS in Europe. After the Quadrennial Defense Review in summer 2009, the Obama administration decided to cancel the planned European third site of ballistic missile defense. The Czech and Polish Prime Ministers were informed of this decision in the middle of the night by a call from Obama. The timing of the announcement was most unfortunate; the news went public on the anniversary of the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland, which marked the beginning of World War II.

In light of his previous doubts about the technical feasibility and political benefit of the MDS, Obama's decision was not totally unexpected. Opponents of the project, both in the Czech Republic and in Europe, welcomed the announcement, yet the Atlanticists felt bitter and disappointed. They interpreted Obama's decision as an attempt to appease Russia in order to achieve other foreign policy goals at the expense of the CEE allies. On the one hand, they understood that after two decades of relatively successful transformation, the region was now democratic and stable and thus required no more close attention from the US. On the other hand, the fear of Russia had not abated, and the unequal deployment of NATO assets between the old and new members raised doubts about NATO's ability to protect its eastern border. This concern was expressed by twenty-two CEE intellectuals and former politicians who wrote a letter to Obama in July 2009. In this letter, which was signed by Václav Havel, Lech Walesa, and Aleksander Kwasniewski, among others, the US was urged to reconnect with the CEE around a "new and

forward-looking agenda."[35] Again, the disappointment among the Atlanticists showed that in their eyes the MDS symbolized US security guarantees to the region rather than a defensive tool aimed at protecting the Euro-Atlantic region against rogue states.

The Bush administration's third site plan was replaced by the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA), which would protect Europe against Iranian short and medium range ballistic missiles. The infrastructure was to be deployed in four phases in Poland and Romania. The Czech Republic was offered a minor role in the EPAA but refused. Nonetheless, the Czech Republic did support the project, which was adopted by the NATO missile defense strategy, in the hope that it would strengthen US involvement in Central and Eastern Europe. NATO invited Russian participation, but the negotiations proved that Russia preferred bilateral negotiations with the US rather than with NATO. The question today remains, to what extent the US is willing to implement the EPAA. In March 2013, it was already announced that the last phase of the EPAA would be dropped. This caused concern among the CEE that, as with the Bush project, the EPAA would be sacrificed in order to gain Russian support for other US foreign policy issues.

Conclusion

The MDS project was a clear demonstration of the current foreign policy positions of its main actors. The Czech Republic, which evolved in the post-Communist era fairly successfully in economic and political terms, lacks clear, long term foreign policy strategy. Instead of discussing the MDS within the context of its strategic significance, it was subordinated to domestic political struggles. Whereas in the early years of transformation mainstream political parties agreed that Czech membership in NATO and the EU was a strategic interest of the country, the MDS project and deeper cooperation with the US was never similarly accepted and remained a divisive topic. The MDS also demonstrated that for the US, the CEE countries, being stable and prosperous countries, no longer represented a "special" case. Rather, the MDS was assessed by the Obama administration mainly from the position of technical feasibility and strategic significance and not as an initiative to strengthen the stability and security of the region. Moreover, the MDS project reminded the Czechs, as well as the international community, that the role of Russia was changing and that Moscow was once again a player, actively involved in its neighborhood either directly or through its proxies.

Five years after the cancellation of the missile defense third site plan, relations between the US and the CEE are not exactly flourishing. The Atlanticists, in particular, feel disillusioned. They criticize Obama for lack of leadership and blame his administration for placating Russia at the expense of the CEE allies. The events in Crimea and Ukraine validated their concerns that Obama's "reset" policy toward Russia was naive. The proponents of strong transatlantic relations hope that the latest events in Eastern Europe will serve as a wake-up call to those who believe that the East European post-1991 border status quo is a given. Russian revisionism and a Western lack of will to stand against it contribute to the feelings of insecurity in the post-Communist countries. Completion of the EPAA could be a way to reassure the CEE about US involvement. It would, in addition, send a clear message to Russia that both US and NATO defense strategies are unfazed by Russian blackmail tactics.

Notes

In preparation of this article, the author conducted the following interviews:

Name	Position	Date
Petr Chalupecký	Deputy Head of Delegation, Czech Permanent Delegation of the CZ to NATO	April 11, 2014
Zbyněk Pavlačík	CEO of Jagello 2000 (Association for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation)	May 5, 2014
Tomáš Pojar	First Deputy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006-10)	April 17, 2014

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11 Transcript of the TV debate with two ministers from the Green party, Martin Bursík and Ondřej Liška, *Czech TV,* May 26, 2008, http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/program/porady/1126672097/text/208411030500601_2.txt.
12 MP Věra Jakubková, Ibid.
13 "Paroubek Threatens Members of the SocDem Party who Support the Radar," *Ihned.cz,* March 5, 2008, http://zpravy.ihned.cz/c1-23111370-paroubek-chysta-bic-na-straniky-kteri-podpori-radar.
14 Ibid.
15 Ivan Gabal, Oldřích Černý, and Jiří Schneider, "Did the Czech Republic Manage the Negotiations about the Anti-Missile Defense between 2006-2009?" Ivan Gabal Analysis & Consulting and Prague Security Studies Institute, February 24, 2010, p. 4. http://www.gac.cz/USerfiles/File/nase_prace_vystupy/GAC_GCS_Radar.pdf?langSEO=documents&parentSEO=nase_prace_vystupy&midSEO=GAC_GCS_Radar.pdf.
16 For example, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Brian Green, Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Subcommittee for Strategic Forces, April 11, 2007.
17 EU High Representative Javier Solana, "Speech to the European Parliament on Foreign and Defense Policy Priorities for 2007," March 29, 2007.
18 According to Nik Hynek, Germany agreed to recognize the US MDS in Europe only after the Czech Republic eased its support of NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. See Nik Hynek, "Anti-Missile Defense in the Current Strategic and Political Context," *Mezinárodní vztahy* 43, no. 4 (2008), p. 25. This connection was not confirmed by all of the interviewed diplomats.
19 "Schwarzenberg: The Radar Aimed at Russia? Why Not?" *Ihned.cz,* December 17, 2007, http://hn.ihned.cz/c1-22630310-radar-zamereny-na-rUSko-proc-ne.
20 Rep. Ellen Tauscher, "Chair's Opening Statement," Hearing of the House Armed Services Committee Sub-Committee on Strategic Forces on Ballistic Missile Defense, March 27, 2007.
21 In 2007, a US National Intelligence Estimate reversed the position toward Iran's nuclear weapons program, claiming that based on new evidence, it concluded that the program had been halted. Since the European part of the MDS was aimed mainly against Iran, this shift in threat assessment among the American intelligence

community provided a useful argument for Czech opponents to the project. Steven A. Hildreth and Carl Ek, "Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe," Congressional Research Service, September 23, 2009, p. 24.

22 US Senator Barack Obama, "Obama Statement on Visit of Polish President Lech Kaczynski," July 16, 2007, http://obama.senate.gov/press/070716-obama_statement_73/.

23 "Putin's Prepared Remarks at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/12/AR2007021200555.html.

24 "Putin Compares US Shield to Cuba," *BBC*, October 26, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7064428.stm.

25 "Russia Threatens to Target US Missile Shield," *The Telegraph*, December 18, 2007, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1573008/RUSsia-threatens-to-target-US-missile-shield.html.

26 Hildreth and Ek, "Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe," p. 24.

27 In 2008 French President Sarkozy suggested that Russia and the US should discuss the foundation of future pan-European security within the OSCE and added: "Please, no more talk about deployment of missile and anti-missile systems." Sarkozy may have pleased the Russians but the statement was totally rejected by both the Czechs and Poles. Moreover, Polish Prime Minister Tusk reminded Sarkozy that it was a bilateral project between the US and Poland and that France would be well advised to keep its opinion to itself. See "France 'Overstepped Mandate' on Missile Shield Moratorium," *EU Observer*, November 17, 2009, http://euobserver.com/defence/27115.

28 Gabal, Černý, and Schneider, "Did the Czech Republic Manage the Negotiations," p. 5.

29 "We Will Aim our Rockets at the Czech Republic, Threatens Moscow," *Novinky.cz*, February 19, 2007, http://www.novinky.cz/zahranicni/evropa/109718-na-cesko-zamerime-rakety-hrozi-moskva.html.

30 For more about the initiative, see http://www.nezakladnam.cz/en/425_about-the-initiative.

31 "Say No to the Bases," *Respekt*, June 6, 2008, http://respekt.ihned.cz/c1-36351320-rekni-ne-zakladnam.

32 "The Parliament wants to Discuss Russian Financial Contributions concerning the Radar," *Ihned.cz*, November 11, 2007, http://zpravy.ihned.cz/c1-22502710-snemovna-chce-jednat-o-ruskem-financovani-odpurcu-radaru.

33 Hildreth and Ek, "Long-Range Ballistic Missile Defense in Europe," p. 22.

34 The upper house, the Senate, had already ratified the treaty in November 2008.

35 "An Open Letter to the Obama Administration from Central and Eastern Europe," *Ihned.cz*, July 17, 2009, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/dokument-otevreny-dopis-vychodoevropskych-politiku-baracku-obamovi-1kg-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A090716_214930_zahranicni_dp.