

**CHALLENGING NEOREALISM -  
FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC  
AND HUNGARY IN RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINIAN  
CRISIS**

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## Abstract

*This study aims to investigate how the Czech Republic and Hungary responded to the Ukrainian crisis and to test whether these reactions conform to neorealist expectations. The paper intends to present the existing concepts on small state foreign policy behaviour, with a key focus on the neorealist perspective and approaches, which challenge its dominance.*

*With the use of second and first-level analysis, the thesis aims to open up the “black boxes” and assess how the Czech Republic and Hungary responded to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The study intends to demonstrate that Czech and Hungarian foreign policy toward Russia cannot be explained through neorealist lenses. Instead, it aims to show that the use of first and second image analysis is indispensable to understand the behaviours of Central Eastern European countries in the post-Maidan world.*

*However, due to the space limitations and complexity of the subject, this study is able to offer neither an applicable theory explaining the behaviour of small states, nor a generalizable toolkit to explain how small states behave under certain external or internal circumstances. The study’s objective is different: it is to reveal the importance of certain approaches instead of theories; to provide evidence that foreign policy-making of small states is extremely complicated; to demonstrate that internal factors are indeed important and cannot be neglected.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Two decades ago, Zbigniew Brzezinski in his seminal book, *The Grand Chessboard*, said that “Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire.”<sup>1</sup> This claim still holds relevance nowadays. There is a broad consensus between scholars and experts that the stake of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is not merely about the control over a couple thousand square kilometres. For Russia, it is about preventing the departure of Ukraine - with a population of more than 40 million, vast arable lands, industrial zones and strategic transit routes - from its sphere of influence and becoming the Eastern beacon of the West.

Control over Ukraine is a game-changer in the regional and global order and the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis has opened a new chapter in the power-struggle or - as many call - a “New Cold War” between “East” and “West”. Nevertheless, this struggle does not only take place in Ukraine but in the whole Central-Eastern-European (CEE) region, from Finland down to the Dardanelles. Ukraine’s neighbourhood is strategic for the future of Moscow and thus it has become a re-emerged battlefield of Western and Russian interests.

At the same time, academic society somehow fails to see beyond Ukraine and does not pay the deserved attention to the more than dozen CEE states close to the crisis zone or they restrict their focus on the Baltic region. This is in spite of the fact that all CEE states are confronted with crucial dilemmas and strategic foreign policy decisions since the eruption of the crisis. Beyond lack of this attention, there seems to be another shortcoming of the contemporary academic discourse on Ukraine: Most scholars, experts and policymakers regard the situation from a security point of view and fail to properly assess the developments of the region from a broader and deeper perspective. They fail to investigate how domestic factors such as national politics; constitutional settings; governmental constrains; foreign policy agendas; business,

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<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, Basic Books, (1993), 46.

political and other interests and strong state leaders influence the behaviour of Central European States and European politics.

It is true that the Ukrainian crisis has created the perfect settings for neorealist explanations on state behaviour in the region. After 25 years of relatively peaceful cooperation between Russia and the West, Russia has clearly become an aggressor: Moscow has violated international law, grabbed Crimea with the use of force and supported separatists via military and financial means against a sovereign government. Russia was conducting military drills around the borders of its Western neighbours, violated maritime waters and airspaces and sent strong and hostile warnings to various states. As a response, NATO reaffirmed its mutual defence guarantee, set up new military bases around Russian borders and established a quick-response battalion. Many of its members committed themselves for stronger cooperation and bigger military spending. These actions and counteractions provide an ideal test for neorealism which regards external and systemic circumstances and especially external security threats and pressures as the prime and ultimate defining factor for (small) state behaviour. Therefore, after a quarter century, this should be the momentum for neorealism to prevail.

It is beyond doubt that Russia's behaviour has created perfect settings for the re-emergence of the security-focused neorealist explanations in international relations. In this regard, John J. Mearsheimer's neorealist analysis<sup>2</sup> has gathered increased attention by the academic society and many agree that structural realism has become the most dominant explanatory framework for the post-Maidan Eastern European reality. However, as this thesis tries to demonstrate, neorealist theory is unable to explain certain state behaviours in the region, including the cases of the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Regardless the fact that international circumstances, i.e. the threat posed by Russia, would expect these states to follow the rules of neorealism, they behave differently: They do not regard the Ukrainian crisis as a threat to their security, instead, they are preoccupied with internal

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<sup>2</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's fault - The Liberal delusions that provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs* (Sep/Oct 2014)

politics, business matters and follow a pragmatic foreign policy. German foreign policy expert Joerg Forbrig has recently said that the expectation for the CEE region was to display more unanimous responses than others in the EU, but instead “a diversity of voices and reactions has emerged from Central Europe.”<sup>3</sup> As the current power struggle between Russia and the “West” is supposed to be the easy test for neorealism, this diversity among CEE state behaviours is more than puzzling.

With all the above in mind, this study aims to investigate how the Czech Republic and Hungary responded to the Ukrainian situation in order to probe why neorealism has limited explanatory purchase in these cases. The first chapter will provide an overview on the academic literature of small state studies and present the existing concepts on small state foreign policy behaviours. Within it, the neorealist perspective for small states will be presented together with the approaches, which challenge its dominance. Chapter two will give an overview on the situation in Ukraine and provide evidence why the current situation should be an easy test for neorealism.

The third and fourth chapter attempt to present the most pressing questions and decisions made by Czech and Hungarian foreign policymakers since the eruption of the crisis (February 2014) until the beginning of May 2015. In these case studies, I will use second and first-level analysis in order to “open up the black boxes” of these small CEE states and see what internal factors stand behind their foreign policy decisions.

Chapter five’s goal is to provide a comparative analysis on the case studies and present their commonalities along with their differences. I hope that the case studies will provide sufficient evidence to conclude that domestic factors cannot be excluded from foreign policy analysis when examining the behaviour of CEE states in the post-Maidan world. This recognition would also mean that rigid systemic theories cannot provide a reliable framework explaining small CEE states’ foreign policies.

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<sup>3</sup> Joerg Forbrig, “A Region Disunited?” in *A Region Disunited?: Central European Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis* The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Europe Policy Paper, (February 2015)

At the beginning of this journey however, I have to highlight a few important remarks to avoid misleading the reader. Due to the space limitations and complexity of the subject, this study is able to offer neither an applicable theory explaining the behaviour of small states, nor a generalizable toolkit to explain how small state behave under certain external or internal circumstances. The independent variables are simply too broad to theorize them into a functioning framework. Nevertheless, my goal is different.

My objective is to reveal the importance of certain approaches instead of theories; to provide evidence that foreign policy-making of small states hold extreme complexities; to demonstrate that internal factors are indeed important and cannot be neglected. I hope that these findings may hold some importance for the discipline: justification to expand the scope of foreign policy analysis even in cases when systemic variables seemingly hold no alternative foreign policy choices for small states. The choice is there and the “black box” has to be discovered to find these alternatives and what stands behind them.



## CHAPTER 1

### CHALLENGING THE “SCHOLARLY CONSENSUS” ON SMALL STATE BEHAVIOUR

This chapter aims to provide a short overview on the various approaches employed on the field of small states studies. In this process, I will present a few definitional questions on small states followed by a short presentation on the major debates, which dominate small state studies discourse. After entering into the field of small state foreign policy behaviour, I will present what important conclusions could be drawn from the existing approaches for the case studies. By doing so, I will argue for revoking the dominating neorealist approach and argue for the use of second and first level analysis for examining small state behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

#### *1.1 Defining small states – Lack of agreement*

Regardless of the rapid pace of globalization, the spread of international institutions, multinational corporations and global NGOs, states still remain the prime actors in the international system. Nowadays, close to 200 states exist with enormous differences between them. Legally, all sovereign states, including microstates and great powers, are deemed to be equal. In reality, however, states' real position is defined by the power they possess.

For realists, state's power is measured by factors such as size of the territory, population (human capital), economic output and military strength. System theorists regard the international environment, geopolitical settings and influence as the key variables. Liberal theorists emphasize the role of international cooperation, meanwhile constructivist and post-modern theorists insist that factors such as international recognition of a state, historical perceptions, national identity, language and cultural power play an essential role when defining the power of states.

With all these competing theories, IR scholars made great efforts to define and classify the features of state and power, but only with a limited success. This is especially true for the

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<sup>4</sup> In this study, I use the words “weak state” and “small state” as identical terms.

definition of small state. Regardless of various attempts, the academic society so far has been unable to agree on a mutually accepted definition on the term, which thus has ever since remained a comparative notion bordering “middle powers” and “microstates.”<sup>5</sup> Christmas-Møller argued that “the problem was to identify the phenomenon as a separate category from neighbouring categories, because the social world is not organized in distinct groups but on a continuum with transition from one category to the next.”<sup>6</sup> Several other scholars also tried to overcome on the same dilemmas such as Robert O. Keohane; Robert O. Rothstein or David Vital.

As the scope of this study is not to present the various approaches on the definition of small state, and in lack of a mutually agreed academic definition, I intend to use the simplest and one of the most often cited definition on the term. In *The Inequality of States*, David Vital defined two types of small states: a) state with a population of 10-15 million in the case of economically advanced countries and b) state with a population of 20-30 million in the case of underdeveloped countries.<sup>7</sup> According to the generally accepted definition of Vital, both the Czech Republic and Hungary are undoubtedly fall into the category of “small state.”<sup>8</sup>

## ***1.2 Small states studies – A neglected and incoherent field of study***

Scholars dealing with small state studies all emphasize that IR have so far largely ignored to properly analyse small states. There are only a few studies on the field until 1950s, and studies on small states were rather sporadic even in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> This is puzzling

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<sup>5</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Sieglinde Gstöhl, “Introduction: Lilliputians in Gulliver’s World,” in *Small States in International Relations*, ed. Christine Ingebritsen et al., (University of Washington Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Wilhelm Christmas-Møller, “Some thoughts on the scientific applicability of the small state concept: a research history and a discussion” in *Small states in Europe and dependence*, ed. Otmar Höll, (No. 6. W. Braumüller, Austrian Institute for International Affairs, 1983), 40.

<sup>7</sup> David Vital, “The inequality of states: a study of the small power in international relations” in *Small States in International Relations*, ed. Christine Ingebritsen et al., (University of Washington Press, 2006), 77-88.

<sup>8</sup> Both two countries fit comfortably within the other various definitional approaches but due to space limits I refrain from further explanation.

<sup>9</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Sieglinde Gstöhl, “Introduction: Lilliputians in Gulliver’s World,” in *Small States in International Relations*, ed. Christine Ingebritsen et al., (University of Washington Press, 2006), 9.

<sup>9</sup> Neumann and Gstöhl, Introduction, 5, 8-9.

due to the fact that the world has witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of new independent small and microstates in the last fifty years. Therefore, analysing the behaviour of small states is on the one hand relevant, and on the other hand it may hold significant new revelations.

Small state studies do not have a long history. Among the very few scholars, who conducted research in the field, we must recall Annette Baker Fox and her landmark book on *The Power of Small States*, which “provided an opening for other scholars to explore cases previously invisible to core international relations theorizing.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of the decolonization process, the number of small states further increased in the 1970s leading to the temporary rise in research on small states in various fields. This interest then returned following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the formation of new small states.<sup>11</sup>

Within small state studies, we can identify some major topics which have been subject to research. Neumann and Gstöhl for example categorize small states studies around three major notions: capabilities; institutions and relations.<sup>12</sup> Knudsen provides a more content-based classification and identifies three major streams of literature: self-determination; foreign policy options of neutrality and alliance; policy formation.<sup>13</sup> Amstrup distinguishes six major fields,<sup>14</sup> but there are various different approaches within the field.

Examining the comprehensive compilation given by Jessica Beyer,<sup>15</sup> the existing literature within small state studies could be classified around the following major topics: (1) Alliance formation and foreign policy-making - Fox; Reiter; Vital; Amstrup; Elman; (2) Economic and globalization challenges - Vogel ; Handel; Katzenstein; Neuman; (3) Studies with a focus on state structure and leadership - Lindell; Persson; Siroky; (4) institutionalists and constructivists -

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Carlsnaes, “How Should we Study the Foreign Policies of Small European States?,” *Nacao Defesa*, Vol. 118 – 3 (2007): 10.

<sup>11</sup> Neumann and Gstöhl, Introduction, 9-15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 17-23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>14</sup> Niels Amstrup, “The perennial problem of small states: a survey of research efforts,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 11.2 (1976): 163-182.

<sup>15</sup> Neumann and Gstöhl, Small States, 293-318.

Ingebritsen, Handel; Björkdahl; Browning; (5) Small states' relationship with the EU - Archer; N. Nugent; Armstrong; H.W., R. Read; Goetschel; Rees; (6) studies on microstates.

As the goal of this thesis is to examine the foreign policies of two CEE states, the research shall focus on studies which assess small states' alliance formation, state structure and leadership - third-, second and first-level images.

### ***1.3 Foreign policy behaviour of small states – Theoretical dilemmas***

It must be stressed that the relatively limited literature in the field was insufficient to provide fertile ground for the creation of any coherent theory on small states foreign policy behaviour. This is attributed to many factors: the lack of interest toward the field within IR community in general; the limitations of the already existing literature in terms of context and coherence; and language barriers.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, some exciting observations do exist in the field.

In the absence of any specific theory on small state behaviour, it could be concluded that small state studies and approaches follows the trends of the main IR-theories. During the Cold War, the realist approach was the exclusive theory with a strict focus on power capabilities and security. This approach became under fire in the 1960s with the spread of behaviourism. In the 1980s, neoliberal institutionalism emerged, while constructivist and post-positivist approaches gained ground at the end of the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

One of the most relevant questions raised by scholars within the field is that whether small state behaviour could be theorized at all. Some deem to prove that it is impossible to draw any conclusions from small state behaviour, while others hold the opposite. Niels Amstrup, a major Danish scholar, made the following remarks on the question:

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<sup>16</sup> Neumann and Gstöhl, Introduction, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 15.

In spite of a considerable number of supposed similarities among the states that are compared, their foreign policy behaviour differs...it is from a theoretical point of view disappointing, because a common property in the independent variable – the small state – should influence the dependent variable – the foreign policy behaviour. It means that even if we limit the number of small states that are compared, the essential problem will not appear to be similarities with respect to foreign policy behaviour, but on the contrary, the dissimilarities. Daniel Frei's demonstration that small states to a considerable extent have alternative possibilities of choice seems to be proved excessively by empirical studies. But for the small state approach it has the deplorable consequence of depriving the size-variable of any analytical meaning.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly to Amstrup, Peter Hansen arrived at the same conclusion following the assessment of the positions toward EEC of five similar states (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Austria).<sup>19</sup> Amstrup and Hansen's observations seem disappointing as it would mean that there is no scientific possibility to find commonalities between small states' foreign policies and thus theorize their behaviour. But others state that Amstrup's position is – at least partly – mistaken.

As Christmas-Møller noted, Karup Petersen managed to identify common small state behaviours in certain eras. Petersen argues that in the 1930s, small states' goal was to maintain their legal and normative interests in the international system, which he called "policy of demonstration". Meanwhile after the Second World War, the policy of non-alignment became a common small state behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Baker Fox also found similar patterns regarding the behaviour

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<sup>18</sup> Christmas-Møller, *Thoughts*, 46.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

of five small states during the Second World War by demonstrating how the governments of Sweden, Spain, Turkey, Switzerland, Ireland and Portugal avoided being drawn into the war.<sup>21</sup>

The above two conflicting findings raise some exciting questions: Could it be assumed that similar small state behaviour could be identified only under certain international conditions, like systemic shocks? If so, what could be viewed as a systemic threat? With regard to the current research, could a re-emerged power-hungry Russia pose such a systemic threat in the region? In the opposite case: if such systemic threat does not exist, could it be assumed that small states' foreign policies '*ab ovo*' diverge as indicated by Amstrup? Could it be stated that when no systemic shocks/threats force small states to follow the only '*ultima ratio*' attitude – seeking state survival –, the existence of similar small state foreign policy outcomes are merely accidental?

I will not be able to properly address these questions and adjudicate between these two competing approaches within the space of this thesis, but their combination may offer some alternatives. It may be claimed that there is a high-likelihood that small states' foreign policy behaviours tend to be similar and thus predictable under significant systemic threats – like during wars or extreme tensions (Second World War; Cold War as claimed by Petersen and Baker Fox). However, without such systemic pressures, as history and several case studies show, small states' foreign policies “by nature” diverge (Amstrup, Hansen).

This would also assume that under strong systemic threats, when state survival reflexes are activated and when security-seeking attitude dominates state's behaviour, the neorealist approach applies, but if there is no sign of such systemic threat, in lack of a security-seeking state behaviour, it doesn't. In those cases states feel so deliberated that they pursue their own, diverging interests shaped by various - mainly internal - factors.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to this research, the above finding means the followings: if a weak CEE state perceives the Ukrainian crisis as a “significant” systemic threat, it means that it will follow a security-seeking foreign policy under the rules of neorealism. Other states with the same

<sup>21</sup> Neumann and Gstöhl, Introduction, 10.

<sup>22</sup> I did not find such conclusions during my research, but some may have already arrived at similar findings.

perceptions also follow this security-seeking pattern. This assumption seems to be true for Poland and the Baltic States and to some extent even for Romania. But does this claim apply for the Czech Republic and Hungary?

This is one of the core questions of this thesis. If the Czech Republic and Hungary deem the Ukrainian crisis as a “systemic” threat, based on the above findings, they presumably follow the neorealist pattern. But if they don’t, there is a high chance that their behaviour will be shaped by other - mainly internal - factors. Based on the above conclusions, there is also a high likelihood that their foreign policy will - due to the complexity and diversity of internal variables - diverge from each other. The case studies must provide answers for these dilemmas.

As understanding the neorealist logic is crucial for the case studies, I will present its features and predictions along with the vivid debate between its advocates and critics.

#### ***1.4 The neorealist “scholarly consensus” on small state behaviour***

When examining small state behaviour, large majority of scholars advocate the neorealist approach and tend to neglect other theories and the use of second and first level analysis. This probably has a lot to do with the fact that small state studies have mainly developed during the Cold War, under which the security-focused realist school dominated the discipline. According to Christmas-Møller, Baker Fox “was beyond doubt the main inspiration for later scholars” and “she became the initiator of the security-oriented small state studies produced within the theoretical framework of the realist school.”<sup>23</sup> Michael Handel also argues that as international system leaves them less room for manoeuvre, and since small states are more preoccupied with survival than big states, the domestic determinants of foreign policy are less salient in weak states.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Christmas-Møller, Thoughts, 37.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 46.

Similarly to this opinion, Jack Snyder argues that domestic political theories do not explain small state behaviour, stating that as they are more “exposed to the vagaries of international security and economic competition” and “since small state foreign policy strategies will reflect an attentiveness to external exigencies, international/structural explanations should suffice.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, K. Hey argues that the systemic level is the key explanatory factor in small state foreign policy behaviour, meanwhile domestic level of analysis has less impact.<sup>26</sup> Jervis also argues that systemic factors are key in small state foreign policies by stating that “the security dilemma is particularly acute for small states that cannot afford to be cheated and are less likely to be buffered from the consequences of foreign-policy mistakes.”<sup>27</sup>

According to this strong - predominantly - neorealist scholarly consensus, according to Elman, weak state behaviour should look in the following way:

Since small states are more preoccupied with survival than great powers, the international system will be the most relevant level of analysis for explaining their foreign policy choices. Because weak states are typically faced with external threats to national survival, their foreign policies will reflect the constraints of the international environment and their foreign-policy behaviour will be mostly independent from internal factors.<sup>28</sup>

Some scholars however disagree with the above opinions and predictions. This thesis also belongs to the critics and aims to question this “scholarly consensus.

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<sup>25</sup> Miriam Fendius Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard,” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Apr., (1995), 176.

<sup>26</sup> Jeanne AK Hey, “Refining Our Understanding of Small State Foreign Policy,” *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy behavior* (2003): 185-195.

<sup>27</sup> Elman, Foreign Policies, 176.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 175.



### 1.5 Challenging neorealism

Neorealist theory holds, that states are assumed to be unitary, rational, self-interested actors, and internal factors and the actual decision-making processes of the state are disregarded as being largely irrelevant. Liberal and constructivist theorists strongly criticize this view and argue that in order to fully understand state behaviour the "black box" of the state should be opened, i.e. internal factors must be examined and understood.

Within the field of small state studies some scholars like Miriam Fendius Elman stresses that the neorealist security-based standpoint must be challenged and that domestic level theorizing must be developed to understand the functioning of weak states.<sup>29</sup> Lindell and Persson arrived at the same conclusion expanding the scope of research from third image analysis to second and first levels, arguing that structure and agency does play a role in small states' foreign policy-making.<sup>30</sup> Regarding the importance of leadership theories, K Hey also admitted that "individual leader can exert an enormous influence on foreign policy."<sup>31</sup> American and US scholars also demonstrated in a recent study that elite ideas about the identity and ideology provide a better explanation of Georgian foreign policy than systemic theories.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to this, with regard to the determinants of small state foreign policy, even Kenneth Waltz, one of the founders of neorealism, is unclear. As Elman points out, Waltz on the one hand "argues that small state security and foreign policy will be dependent on structural constraints, such as the degree of great power competition" and that "small states will need to be more attentive to these external constraints" due to their 'narrower margin for error.'<sup>33</sup> Elman continues:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>30</sup> Neumann and Gstöhl, Introduction, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Jeanne AK Hey, "Refining Our Understanding of Small State Foreign Policy," *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy behaviour*, (2003): 185-195.

<sup>32</sup> Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze, and Zurab Iashvili, "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States," *Security Studies* 22, no. 1 (2013): 98-131.

<sup>33</sup> Elman, Foreign Policies, 175.

On the other hand, Waltz claims that the smaller the state, the more it is likely to take international constraints for granted, since nothing it does can significantly affect the international system. Moreover, because great powers focus their attention on those states most likely to present a security threat, they will be less interested in weak states. As a result, small states will face fewer external constraints and their behaviour will be more likely to reflect domestic political influences.<sup>34</sup>

It is without doubt that these are very important findings. Besides these, some collections on small state foreign policy behaviour exist. In a book edited by Barston, various authors, including Orvik, Baehr, Freymond and others assess the foreign strategy of small states including Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Cyprus. These scholars do not exclude systemic factors, but place their focus mostly on the second and first level elements: They investigate historical experience; state structure and foreign-policy-making processes; leaders' role; foreign policy goals and objectives; and economic and cultural questions.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to this, policy papers prepared by the various think-tanks around the world on foreign policy questions never neglect to emphasize certain relevant domestic factors in foreign policy-making. The recent study prepared by the German Marshall Fund on CEE states' behaviour on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis also clearly demonstrate that historical relations, public perceptions, economic factors, foreign policy agenda all play a defining role in the behaviour of CEE states.<sup>36</sup>

In accordance with the above claims, the case studies aim to demonstrate that second and first image factors, such as state structure, internal political settings, economic interests and other factors have a determining role in the foreign policy outcomes. However, I must stress that due to space limitations and the complexity of foreign policy-making of the examined states, my goal

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Peter Barston, *"The Other Powers: Studies in the Foreign Policies of Small States"* (George Allen & Unwin, 1973)

<sup>36</sup> Joerg Foerbrig, "A Region Disunited?"

is limited in this research: I will not be able to set up any functioning theory, but intend to provide sound evidence that it is a mistake to use rigid systemic approaches for analysing small state behaviour. Instead, we have to extend the scope of research from systemic level to second and first image analysis.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS - THE SUPPOSEDLY EASY TEST FOR NEOREALISM

This chapter intends to shortly present the background of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This chapter also aims to show the magnitude and intensity of tensions between Russia and NATO in order to demonstrate that the current tense situation between the parties is one of the biggest security threats for small CEE states since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, under such great systemic pressures, explaining the behavior of small CEE states should be an easy test for neorealism.

#### *2.1 Russia's conflict with Ukraine - The biggest security threat since the 1990s*

After the Orange Revolution in 2004, Moscow's relationship with Kiev was burdened with several political and economic disputes over natural gas prices, political reforms, NATO-membership and Western rapprochement. After the election of Viktor Yanukovich as Ukrainian President in early 2010, bilateral relations have improved, but differences remained. But EU's bid to conclude an association agreement with Ukraine put Yanukovich into a catch22, forcing him to choose between Western integration and Russia's support. Following extreme political and economic pressure from Moscow, Yanukovich refused signing the agreement with the EU and instead concluded a financial and gas deal with Russia.<sup>37</sup> This has sparked widespread anti-government and pro-EU protests and later led to the "Euromaidan revolution" in February 2014. Although the revolution has ousted Yanukovich, the fragile situation provided a window of opportunity for Russia, who invaded and later annexed Crimea and armed anti-government separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

Western leaders raised their voices to these developments unanimously condemning Russia's moves. Then NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called Crimea's grab

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<sup>37</sup> "Russia offers Ukraine major economic assistance," accessed 30, May, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25411118>

”the gravest threat” to European security and stability since the fall of communism and warned that Russia’s actions marks the beginning of a “new Cold War.”<sup>38</sup>

## ***2.2 Growing tensions - The security dilemma in motion***

Since Russia’s actions against Ukraine, politicians and foreign policy experts have engaged into heated debates on the reasons behind the conflict and the consequences it brings for the region and the global order. As a predominantly military conflict, the debate on the Ukrainian crisis mostly focuses on security-related questions and dominated with expressions such as war, power, conflict, strategy, geopolitics and defense. The situation is most often simplified as a re-emerged power struggle between “East” and “West”.

Along with others, S.F.Cohen regards the crisis as the beginning of a New Cold War;<sup>39</sup> Mearsheimer describes the conflict as a result of a systemic security threat caused by the continuous eastward expansion of NATO,<sup>40</sup> meanwhile others, like Walter Russell Mead talks about the return of geopolitics.<sup>41</sup> All of them are right. Events, reactions and the emerged discourse on the crisis show that the Ukrainian crisis is a hard-core security challenge, one of the biggest one since the fall of communism in the early 1990s.

Ever since the crisis erupted, tensions are growing between NATO states and Russia. Already in April 2014, NATO had announced a series of military measures to strengthen the collective defence of the alliance’s territory and increased the number of fighter jets for airspace surveillance over the Baltic States.<sup>42</sup> In September 2014, with the participation of more than 4000 delegates and officials, NATO leaders hold a summit in Wales. Responding to the Ukrainian

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<sup>38</sup> Karen DeYoung, “Russia’s moves in Ukraine are ‘wake-up call,’ NATO’s Rasmussen says in speech,” accessed, 25 May, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russias-moves-in-ukraine-are-wake-up-call-natos-rasmussen-says-in-speech/2014/03/19/80560d7c-af88-11e3-9627-c65021d6d572\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russias-moves-in-ukraine-are-wake-up-call-natos-rasmussen-says-in-speech/2014/03/19/80560d7c-af88-11e3-9627-c65021d6d572_story.html)

<sup>39</sup> S. F. Cohen. “The New Cold War”, Interview in the Big Picture, accessed, May 29, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bm\\_1ddQkHak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bm_1ddQkHak)

<sup>40</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin." *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 77.

<sup>41</sup> Russell Walter Mead, "The Return of Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2014): 69-79.

<sup>42</sup> Christian Nünlist and Martin Zapfe, “NATO after Wales: Dealing with Russia,” *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, N0. 161, (October 2014), 2

crisis and the emerged security challenges, the summit established a continuous rotation of air, land and maritime forces in Eastern Europe and a 4,000 to 6,000 strong quick response-group. The summit declaration included strong wording against Russian actions and reaffirmed the collective mutual assistance guarantee under Article V. NATO members committed themselves to raise military budget above the required 2% GDP and substantially increase investment into military equipment and technology.<sup>43</sup> By many experts, the summit was regarded as a turning point in NATO's post-Cold War history.<sup>44</sup>

As a response to NATO's moves, Russia adopted a new military doctrine at the end of 2014, which identified NATO's expansion as the prime threat, enabling the joint setting up of missile defence systems by Russia and allied countries,<sup>45</sup> a major novelty to the previous doctrine. The document stated that NATO states are "undermining global stability and violating the balance of power in the nuclear-missile sphere."<sup>46</sup>

In the meantime, a series of incidents took place between Russian and NATO fighters, submarines and vessels along the common borders. The European Leadership Network, a global think-tank has identified altogether 66 military incidents between NATO and Russian forces for the period of March 2014 to March 2015. These include several cases with high escalation risks not only in the Baltic and the Black Sea region but above Atlantic waters.<sup>47</sup> Regardless of some progress between Russia and Ukraine following the adoption of the Minsk Agreement in February 2015, clashes between NATO and Russian forces did not disappear. In May 2015, two Russian naval ships and a Russian submarine were located just miles from Latvian territorial

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<sup>43</sup> "Wales Summit Declaration," accessed, May 29, 2015, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Reuters and Pamela Engel, "Putin Warns In A New Military Doctrine That The Expansion Of NATO Is A Threat," accessed, May 29, 2015, <http://www.businessinsider.com/putin-warns-in-a-new-military-doctrine-that-the-expansion-of-nato-is-a-threat-2014-12#ixzz3bardDJaR>

<sup>46</sup> Jaroslaw Adamowski, "Russia Overhauls Military Doctrine," accessed, May 29, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/policy/2015/01/10/russia-military-doctrine-ukraine-putin/21441759/>

<sup>47</sup> European Leadership Network, "List of Close Military Encounters Between Russia and the West, March 2014 - March 2015," accessed, May 29, 2015, <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2015/03/11/4264a5a6/ELN%20Russia%20-%20West%20Full%20List%20of%20Incidents.pdf>

waters in the Baltic Sea and unidentified submarines were located near Helsinki and Swedish waters in April 2015.<sup>48</sup>

In February 2015, NATO announced its plans to staff six new European bases to its easternmost member states and increase NATO's rapid reaction units from 13,000 to 30,000. The alliance's Secretary general Jens Stoltenberg called the move as "the biggest reinforcement of [NATO] collective defence since the end of the Cold War."<sup>49</sup> According to security experts, such as Michael Clarke director general of the Royal United Services Institute, the move symbolises the return of Russia as NATO's biggest security threat.<sup>50</sup>

In response, in March 2015, Russia conducted a large-scale military drill both in the Baltic and Black sea region with the involvement of strategic nuclear weapon systems, simulating a full-scale confrontation with NATO.<sup>51</sup> Analysis indicated that the forward deployment of ballistic missiles and bomber aircraft are provocative indicators of possible pre-emptive action against NATO and Eastern Europe.<sup>52</sup> It also added that by deploying Tu-22M3 bomber aircraft, "Russia is also openly invoking the threat of nuclear confrontation" targeting NATO and its Eastern European members.<sup>53</sup>

The above examples show that the aftermath of the Maidan revolution has created a tense environment between Russia and NATO. Russia's moves have undoubtedly raised the level of tensions in the region to its highest rate since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Based on the conclusions made on the academic literature's main findings on small states behaviour at the end of the previous chapter, this situation should paralyze small CEE states, make them highly concerned about their security, and therefore they should follow the neorealist prescription when conducting foreign and defence policies.

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<sup>48</sup> "European war games: Responses to Russian military drills," accessed, May 29, 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/european-war-games-responses-russian-military-drills-314410>

<sup>49</sup> Damien Sharkov, "NATO Declares Russia Its Greatest Threat, Announces 'Biggest Reinforcement since the End of the Cold War'," accessed, 30 May, 2015, <http://russia-insider.com/en/2015/02/06/3191>

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Russia Targets NATO With Military Exercises," accessed, May 29, 2015, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russia-targets-nato-military-exercises>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

### ***2.3 The neorealist prescription for CEE states***

Neorealism advocates that international environment, structural constraints and systemic factors determine state behaviour in international relations and that states act according to the logic of self-help, seeking their own interest. As states' primary goal is survival, states are highly concerned about their security and thus they develop strong military capacities and seeking to maximize their relative power. According to the neorealist theory, states lack of mutual trust, facing uncertainty and a constant security dilemma.<sup>54</sup>

In accordance with this, as the level of international tensions and external threat stand at the highest rate of the last 25 years, weak CEE states are expected to become highly concerned about their own security and take decisive defensive military actions, for example increasing state alert, military budget and the size of the army. But as they are small, weak and highly vulnerable, in lack of sufficient military capabilities to effectively encounter any major Russian military invasion, their real defence shield is NATO.

This means that their security and survival mainly depends on NATO and major Western allies. Therefore, they have to push NATO for increased engagement in the region, please US and major members to gain their close friendship, protection and support. They also have to fully implement the decisions taken by NATO targeting Russia. This could include increased military spending, troop deployment in crisis zones and the full implementation of anti-Russian sanctions.

### ***2.4 An easy test for neorealism?***

The above findings and the previous chapter's conclusions clearly suggest that under such settings, neorealism is the prime theory to explain small CEE state behaviour. The above facts show that there is a very alarming systemic threat posed by Russia, the biggest since the 1990s. The conclusion of the first chapter affirms that in case of systemic threats, small states react and follow the neorealist assumption. This means that the foreign policy behaviour of small CEE

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<sup>54</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz. 2000. "*Structural Realism after the Cold War*," (International Security, Vol. 25, No.1) 5-41.



states in the post-Maiden world shall be an easy test for neorealism. In the next two chapters, the thesis will assess whether this neorealism pass the reality check: The case studies will examine the foreign policies of the Czech Republic and Hungary in response to the Ukrainian crisis with a special focus on the assessment on non-systemic factors in their foreign policy-making.

The Czech Republic and Hungary seem ideal candidates for the comparative case study due to their similarities: Both countries are identical in terms of size; population; economic output; have the same military capabilities.<sup>55</sup> Both countries are members of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), located in the same region relatively close to the conflict; have similar internal institutional settings (democratic institutions, multi-party system and market economy) and share analogous historical pasts and memories on communism and Soviet oppression. Still, regardless of all these similarities, the two countries reveal significant differences when it comes to foreign policy, its making and responses to the Ukrainian crisis.

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<sup>55</sup> Active military personnel: CZR: 21.000 (Ministry of Defense, 2014); HU: 29.700 (Ministry of Defense, 2014)

### CHAPTER 3

## NATIONAL POLITICS, PRAGMATISM, ELITE NETWORKS - THE CZECH CASE

This chapter aims to present the most relevant internal factors that influenced the Czech position on the situation in Ukraine. This part of the thesis intends to demonstrate that the neorealist presumption is not applicable for Czech state behaviour due to various reasons. First and foremost (1) the Ukrainian crisis was not perceived as a security threat by the Czech government which (2) remained very critical on the sanction regime employed by the EU. This chapter also aims to demonstrate that this position has evolved as a result of (3) national politics; and (4) the government's pragmatic foreign policy agenda; and was strongly influenced by (5) the Czech constitutional framework; (6) Czech President Milos Zeman; and (7) the political elite's networks to Russia.

While revealing the importance of these factors, I intend to show why neorealism fails to provide an appropriate explanation on the behaviour of Czech foreign policy and demonstrate that second and first-level analysis is crucial in understanding the foreign policy orientation and decisions of a given country.

It also must be noted, that beyond the examined factors, there are naturally other important elements which influenced the Czech position on Russia. These include the public opinion of the Czech society, historical relations, some specific business and energy issues and the role of Russian minority in the Czech Republic. Having included these factors into the study, the picture on Czech politics would be much more complex which would further strengthen the claim that domestic features essentially influence foreign policy-making and foreign policy outcomes. However, due to space restrictions, these issues are excluded from this study.

### ***3.1 The Trans-Atlantic institutional framework***

At the beginning of the case studies, it has to be highlighted that the Trans-Atlantic institutional framework, i.e. NATO and EU membership defined the scope within which both the Czech Republic and Hungary's foreign policy manoeuvring sphere was laid out. Both countries have aligned themselves with and implemented all NATO and EU decisions on Ukraine/Russia, but both countries kept a very critical and pragmatic position on the matter during the whole crisis.

On the one hand, Czech and Hungarian state officials called for the respect of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity and signed up for all EU positions, but on the other hand they expressed their strong disagreements on the practicability and necessity of the sanctions. This position has put both countries to the group of “doves”, a club of European states which took a more critical tone against anti-Russian sanctions and a more practical attitude toward Russia. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his ministers<sup>56</sup> similarly to Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka and his cabinet members repeated the above position on various occasions.<sup>57</sup>

However, regardless of being limited in the scope of actions due to joint EU positions, the behaviour of both states has raised eyebrows around Europe. Within EU28, the Czech Republic and Hungary (along with Slovakia) were deemed to have the most pro-Russian stances. This position went fully against neorealist perceptions. This was particularly puzzling due to these countries proximity to the crisis; the continuous border incidents between NATO and Russian forces; historical memory on Soviet communist occupation and energy dependence on Russia. Neorealist expectation would hold that these countries should follow a stronger, hawkish line against Russia and initiate decisive steps to strengthen their security and please their strong Western allies.

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<sup>56</sup> “Hungary fully committed to Ukraine sovereignty, territorial integrity, says Martonyi,” accessed, May 16, 2015, <http://www.hirado.hu/2014/03/03/hungary-fully-committed-to-ukraine-sovereignty-territorial-integrity-says-martonyi/>

<sup>57</sup> Daniela Lazarová, “Czech government condemns Russia's intrusion into Ukraine”, accessed, May 30, 2015, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curaffrs/czech-government-condemns-russias-intrusion-into-ukraine>

### *3.2 Declining military budget*

For almost a decade, there have been various calls mainly from the US toward NATO member states to meet their 2%/GDP annual military spending commitments and increase their defence budgets gradually. These constant calls were intensified by NATO and US leaders, including Barack Obama, after Russia's military engagements in Ukraine.<sup>58</sup> Small CEE states' military spending has experienced a gradual decline since the 1990s and ranged much below the 2% target, which situation has been strongly criticized in the wake of the crisis. Responding to Russia's moves in Ukraine and border incidents with NATO forces, NATO states once again made a political pledge and reaffirmed their commitment to gradually increase military spending above 2% of GDP in the NATO Summit in Wales. However, no specific timeframe was set to reach such goal. As a result of the above developments, several CEE states significantly boosted their military spending, including Poland, the Baltic States and Romania.<sup>59</sup> The actions of these states seem to stand fully in line with the neorealist expectation.

The Czech Republic was also subject of calls to raise budget numbers for the military and political pledges were made by the government to deliver these in the coming years.<sup>60</sup> However, regardless of US pressure, pledges to NATO in Wales and promises of the Czech Prime Minister and Defence Minister for short-term and mid-term increases, these were not implemented.<sup>61</sup> The Czech military budget has not only failed to increase significantly, but has witnessed a drop from 1,08% to 1,04%/GDP share from 2014 to 2015.<sup>62</sup> Instead, the Czech state budget for 2015

<sup>58</sup> Tom Curry, "Obama Calls On Europeans To Boost Military Spending," accessed, May 30, 2015, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/obama-calls-europeans-boost-military-spending-n63881>

<sup>59</sup> "Poles, Baltics and Scandinavia Rally Troops as Russia Grows," accessed, May 30, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/04/03/poles-baltics-and-scandinavia-rally-troops-as-russia-grows/25245417/>

<sup>60</sup> Ian Willoughby, "Military spending must rise in wake of Ukraine crisis, says defence minister," accessed, May 30, 2015, <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/coraffrs/military-spending-must-rise-in-wake-of-ukraine-crisis-says-defence-minister>

<sup>61</sup> Gerard O'Dwyer and Jaroslaw Adamowski, "Ukraine Crisis Revives Spending From Nordics to E. Europe," accessed, May 30, 2015, <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20140614/DEFREG/306140020/Ukraine-Crisis-Revives-Spending-From-Nordics-E-Europe>

<sup>62</sup> "Basic Data of the State Budget in Chapter of the Ministry of Defence in 1993 – 2015," accessed, 23 May, 2015, <http://www.army.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=5760>

favoured pay rises for state employees and the social sector and budgetary discipline,<sup>63</sup> a delivery of electoral pledges of the Social-Democrats and ANO 2011, the two dominating parties in the coalition.<sup>64</sup> As the numbers show, despite the situation in Ukraine, calls from NATO and governmental promises, Czech defence expenditure has shrunken from 2014 to 2015.

This phenomenon is one of the most demonstrative evidence that the Czech governing coalition did not perceive the situation in Ukraine as a threat to the country's security. Otherwise, this would have been reflected in the state's military spending. This lack of concern over security goes fully against the neorealist expectations and therefore we have to have a look what factors stand behind this behaviour.

### ***3.3 Diverse and diverging national politics***

Due to the constitutional framework, the Czech political system is very diverse. The Czech electoral system provides proportional representation for all parties reaching the 5% threshold at general elections providing an ideal framework for a real multi-party competition on the one hand, however, on the other hand it creates difficulties for stable governance as parties with diverse background and priorities are forced to form multi-party coalitions. This “pro-multi-party” domestic institutional feature is incorporated in the Czech political landscape: There are four middle-size parties and three smaller parties in the Czech Parliament. The Social Democrats only came winners in the general elections with a mere 20.45%. Parliamentary parties cover the very wide Czech political spectrum and represent very diverging positions on Russia and the situation in Ukraine.

Before the crisis, two considerably different narratives about Russia and Russian-Czech relations divided the political elite: The first, more typical for the right-wing parties depicted

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<sup>63</sup> “Budget approved for 2015 boost social spending but cuts investments,” accessed, 31 May, 2015, <http://www.czech.cz/en/Business/Budget-approved-for-2015-boosts-social-spending-bu>

<sup>64</sup> See Coalition Agreement” between the ČSSD, the ANO 2011 Movement and the KDU-ČSL, [http://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/dulezite-dokumenty/en\\_koalicni\\_smlouva.pdf](http://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/dulezite-dokumenty/en_koalicni_smlouva.pdf)

Russia as a threat and argued that Czech foreign policy should enhance close ties with NATO and the US, the main guarantor of Czech security.<sup>65</sup> The second narrative was prevailing on the left wing of the Czech political spectrum and regarded Russia as an economic opportunity and took a pragmatic business-oriented approach.<sup>66</sup> Based on the history of the Czech foreign policy in the last 25 years, it could be stated that the official Czech-Russian state relations depended largely on which side of the Czech political spectrum dominated the government and the foreign affairs.

As Czech scholar Petr Kratochvil indicated in his recent study, the Ukrainian crisis was the most substantial of the external shocks that have influenced relations between the Czech Republic and Russia but “even this most serious breach of European security order has not led to the defeat of the Russia-friendly orientation among parts of the political elites.”<sup>67</sup> He also added that “nowhere is the lack of foreign policy consensus more visible than in the [Czech’s] approach to Russia, particularly the recent Russian-Ukrainian conflict.” He identified four major positions toward the crisis within Czech politics.”<sup>68</sup>

Right-wing conservative political forces (such as the TOP09 party and former Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg) were taking a very strong anti-Russian hawkish stance calling for tougher sanctions against Russia, enhanced support for Ukraine including military training and equipment. The second major group was the position of “multilateralists” who were very close to the EU-mainstream, arguing that sanctions are unfortunate but necessary and that the EU should work to find a political solution and restore normal relations with Russia.<sup>69</sup>

The third major grouping was the pragmatists, who did not regard the conflict as a threat to Czech security, but worried about its economic consequences and wanted to eliminate economic sanctions against Russia. This position was and still the most widespread among the

<sup>65</sup> Petr Kratochvil, “The Czech Republic: Lacking Foreign Policy Consensus” in *A Region Disunited? - Central European Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Europe Policy Paper, (February 2015), 12.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

governing political elites, supported by both Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka and Finance Minister Andrej Babis, the two key leaders of the coalition government. The fourth line, the “Friends of Russia” group follows mainly the official Russian line on Ukraine and its advocates covers a diverse and influential group of persons from various parts of the political spectrum including the Communist Party, the leftist Czech President Milos Zeman and former conservative President Vaclav Klaus.<sup>70</sup>

Obviously, Czech foreign policy is dominated by the orientation represented by the governing parties. The current Czech government is a three-party coalition between the Social-Democrats (20,45%); ANO 2011 (18,65%) and the Christian democrat KDU–CSL (6,78%). The government took office at the end of January 2014, just a month before the Ukrainian crisis.

The leading force, the Social Democrats were following a generally pragmatic stance on Russia in the last decade and this position has not changed due to Ukraine. The Social Democrat Prime Minister, Sobotka had a difficult job in balancing between his own party members, the governing parties and external actors, such as the US. Sobotka had to pay careful attention to the Social Democratic party’s senior politicians, who "understand" Putin, have a strong say within the party and would not support a tougher stance on Russia.<sup>71</sup>

The second strongest party in the government is ANO 2011, an anti-establishment formation. The party founder is Andrej Babis, current finance minister, the second richest businessman in the country and owner of a business empire worth about \$2.5 billion and the country’s most important media outlet. Babis’ company, Agrofert's 2013 turnover was \$6.9 billion, equivalent to 3.7 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Agrofert consists of companies dealing with food, chemicals and media and employing 28,000 staff.<sup>72</sup> ANO pursues a liberal-type economic pragmatism focusing on economy and trade. Their pragmatic business-

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>71</sup> “HN: Sobotka’s stance on Russia is like détente,” accessed May 31, 2015, <http://praguepost.com/eu-news/40566-hn-sobotka-s-stance-on-russia-is-like-detente#ixzz3biLWYh7D>

<sup>72</sup> Jan Lopatka, “Czech billionaire's political rise inspires some, alarms others,” accessed May 31, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/05/us-czech-politics-babis-idUSKBN0IP0P320141105>

oriented approach is clearly reflected in the government's shift in foreign policy priorities toward economic diplomacy and the critical approach toward anti-Russian sanctions.

Owing one of the biggest empires in the Czech Republic, Babis is personally interested in keeping strong business relations with Russia as tougher sanctions on Russia could threaten his interests and his companies. However, recently ANO's stance has started to become more critical on Russia. Analyst explain this step as a move to the right in order to differentiate itself from the Social Democrats and appeal to the voters disappointed with the performance of the right-wing parties.<sup>73</sup> This shows how business and political interests are constantly changing foreign policy attitudes on certain issues.

The smallest coalition partner the centre-right Christian Democrats has much lesser say in foreign politics, than two major coalition partners. They were mainly supporting the general line that the government took on Russia including its positions on the sanctions.

The diverse political landscape and political parties' various positions on Russia already challenge neorealism's prime suggestion, i.e. states foreign policy is determined mainly by systemic factors. As the above picture show, in the Czech Republic, internal political settings, national politics and the colour of the government largely determine what foreign policy and what Russia policy the state will pursue. Having a hawkish centre-right government in the Czech Republic with TOP 09 chairman Karel Schwarzenberg - who has been recently banned from Russia along with TOP 09 deputy head Marek Zenisek, former TOP 09 senator Jaromír Stetina and former EU enlargement commissioner Stefan Füle<sup>74</sup> - than no doubt that the Czech government would pursue a very different foreign policy than that of the current Socialist-led cabinet.

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<sup>73</sup> "ANO presents pro-American, anti-Russian policy," accessed May 31, 2015, <http://178.79.133.112/2015/02/13/ano-presents-pro-american-anti-russian-policy>

<sup>74</sup> "Schwarzenberg, others banned from Russia," accessed May 31, 2015, <http://praguepost.com/world-news/48044-schwarzenberg-others-banned-from-russia>



### ***3.4 Havel's legacy vs pragmatic foreign policy agenda***

After the fall of communism, the pillars of the Czech foreign policy were established by Vaclav Havel, writer, philosopher and president of Czechoslovakia between 1989-1993 and then of the Czech Republic between 1993-2003. Havel was a key figure of the anti-communist resistance which experience has determined his devotion to democracy, respect of human rights and the Euro-Atlantic integration. This devotion has left the mark on his entire presidency and the Czech foreign policy as well. This has relevance for the Czech foreign policy on Russia due to the emerged “Havelian” tradition on the promotion of human rights. Klaus’ presidency and the conservative Czech governments have altered Havel’s European orientation by taking a more balanced, “Eurorealist” stance on European matters.

The current Czech government aimed to execute a complete shift from both Vaclavs’ legacy. Bohuslav Sobotka’s cabinet established the country’s foreign policy orientation around two major priorities: Restoring the country’s reputation and strengthening ties with the EU; and foreign policy pragmatism, i.e. putting economic matters ahead of human rights issues. Nonetheless, these two principles are often conflicting. Out of these, the most demonstrative case was the government’s position on Russia: on the one hand the Czech government tried to position itself to the mainstream EU line to restore confidence lost under Klaus’ presidency and on the other hand it tried to reduce economic sanctions against Russia to the lowest possible degree, which limbo has caused much confusion during the crisis.

These priorities were clearly outlined during Sobotka’s annual meeting of Ambassadors in August 2014. In his speech, Sobotka made clear his pro-EU agenda, stating that “the strategic interest of the Czech Republic is to be an integral part of the EU and to move into its main path toward integration” adding that mistakes of the past will not be repeated and that “European integration does not divide the coalition and this Government, but connects it.”<sup>75</sup> Regarding the

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<sup>75</sup> “Speech by the Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka at the start of the meeting of ambassadors of the CR,” accessed 8 May, 2015, <http://www.vlada.cz/en/clenove-vlady/premier/speeches/speech-by-the-prime-minister-bohuslav-sobotka-at-the-start-of-the-meeting-of-ambassadors-of-the-cr-122217/>

government's increased interests toward economic diplomacy, Sobotka underlined that “the centre of gravity of international affairs is shifting from the north Atlantic” and “this represents a major opportunity and allows room for our [Czech] active economic diplomacy.”<sup>76</sup>

Although Sobotka did not say that human rights' questions will be subordinated to economic matters, he only referred to the promotion of human rights after economic diplomacy and he diluted it by saying that “second and third generation human rights, for example economic and social rights, or rights relating to the environment” must be part of the human rights agenda. In this regard it must be stressed that in his speech, Sobotka has often referred to the changing poles and power centres of the world stating for example that “Europe and North America are no longer the only dominant players on the international chessboard, even in political terms” which has to be kept in mind when conducting foreign policy.<sup>77</sup> Such line is in total contrast to the centre rights' Czech forces view on the Trans-Atlantic community.

This above vision, i.e. the abandonment of Havel's legacy replaced with economic and foreign policy pragmatism was especially visible in the Czech-Chinese relations, in which field the government abandoned human rights criticism and aligned itself with the Chinese position on Tibet and Taiwan.<sup>78</sup> To underpin this shift, in an interview, First Deputy Foreign Minister Petr Drulák once said that late Czech President Václav Havel's foreign policy with its stress on human rights was wrong and harmful and represented a “false universalism” and a “false idea.”<sup>79</sup> Following a public outcry, later he had to moderate his words.

This foreign policy pragmatism was also reflected in the Czech' government position on Ukraine. Since the eruption of the crisis Sobotka's government has taken a much more conciliatory approach toward Russia: it condemned Russia's actions, but argued against economic sanctions. Due to the government's emphasis on economic matters, the government tried its best

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Jan Richter, “Czech government aims to reset relations with China,” accessed 8 May, 2015, <http://radio.cz/en/section/czraffrs/czech-government-aims-to-reset-relations-with-china>

<sup>79</sup> “Gov't minister: Havel's human rights policy was wrong,” accessed 8 May, 2015, <http://www.praguepost.com/world-news/39342-gov-t-minister-havel-s-human-rights-policy-was-wrong>

to minimize the scope of economic sanctions and their effect on the Czech economy. This was due to the fact that although Russia accounted for a relatively small share of Czech exports, only 4.5%, trade relations between the two countries have been intensifying steadily in the 2010s.<sup>80</sup>

Czechs managed to decrease their very high trade deficit against Russia in the last years and the current government was keen to keep the dynamism of growing Czech exports to Russia intact. One of the key priorities of the Czech economic diplomacy was to find new markets for Czech products and intensify economic growth via enhanced exports to Eastern Markets. This goal was clearly expressed in the coalition agreement and was also outlined by governmental officials on various occasions.<sup>81</sup> Russia, as a huge market close to the Czech companies, was deemed of course as a key partner in this strategy.

Besides the above, the Czech government was extremely concerned about the future of engineering and automobile industry products in the Russian market as experts feared that the impacts of the sanctions could be indirect in the form of decreasing exports to Germany. Experts said that about 70% of Czech companies could be affected if stronger sanctions were adopted against Russia. Czech arm industry and financial sector also pressured the Czech government not to support tough sanctions against Russia.<sup>82</sup>

This continuous concern regarding the state of Czech companies and Czech exports to Russia has been continuously manifested by governmental officials since the Ukrainian crisis, putting the Czech government to the group of “doves” among EU28. In August 2014, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Cyprus refused to back stronger sanctions against Russia, but ultimately backed down a week later, sparking criticism from their EU partners.<sup>83</sup> In an interview before the summit the Czech premier said that “[the Czechs] are trying to agree on a form of

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<sup>80</sup> Kratochvíl, 12.

<sup>81</sup> See Coalition Agreement and PM Sobotka’s speech to Czech Ambassadors.

<sup>82</sup> “Sanctions against Russia could influence Czech export in the long term,” accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://www.czechcompete.cz/policy-pipeline/czech-republic/1772-sanctions-against-russia-could-influence-czech-export-in-the-long-term>

<sup>83</sup> Robert Anderson, “Czech foreign policy in spotlight as Havel doctrine questioned,” accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://www.bne.eu/content/story/czech-foreign-policy-spotlight-havel-doctrine-questioned>

sanctions that would cause the least possible harm to the functioning of the Czech Republic, the Czech military and the financial sector."<sup>84</sup>

In January 2015, when the EU was preparing to adopt new sanctions against Russia, Tomáš Prouza, Czech State Secretary for European Affairs, warned against blanket economic sanctions and said it would make no sense to seek sanctions which would harm the EU as much as Russia.<sup>85</sup> More recently Minister of Industry and Trade Jan Mládek defended government's trade and foreign policy by saying that trade links to Russia continue to be promoted by the Czech state and "that exports to Russia and similar destinations can often offer better prospects to Czech companies than to Western Europe."<sup>86</sup>

This position supported economic diplomacy' objectives, but of course contradicted Sobotka's goal to restore the country's reputation within the EU left by Vaclav Klaus's anti-EU legacy, which would have required the government to take the EU's mainstream position on Russia and minimise reservations on the EU sanction regimes. Due to these conflicting priorities, the Czech government has been in a limbo between the mainstream EU position and the pro-Russia stance. This has often caused difficulties to follow the Czech government's position on Russia which was only worsened by Zeman's controversial statements on EU Russia relations.

Since the crisis, the Czech government has been particularly occupied with the economic sanctions and its consequences on the Czech economy and trade relations with Russia. This phenomenon once again went against neorealist expectations, which would assume that small CEE states are highly concerned about their security and thus they support a joint and strong position with their allies against an aggressor in their close neighbourhood.

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<sup>84</sup> HN, "Sobotka's stance like détente,"

<sup>85</sup> "Russia counts on EU 'friends' to avert further sanctions," accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/russia-counts-eu-friends-avert-further-sanctions-303091>

<sup>86</sup> "Industry and trade minister speak out in favour of Russian trade links," accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://www.czech.cz/en/Economie/Industry-and-trade-minister-speaks-out-in-favour-o>

### ***3.5 Confusing institutional settings and a strong-minded pro-Russia President***

The Czech foreign policy is often characterized as being “double-track” in nature. According to the constitutional settings, the Czech government is the main actor in foreign policy-making: the government is the supreme executive body and responsible for making and executing foreign policy in which the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister have key importance.<sup>87</sup> However, in contrast to other CEE countries, the Czech President enjoys considerable autonomy in international relations according to the Czech Constitution (Art. 63.[1]).<sup>88</sup> As history shows, it is very much up to the personality and own agenda of the respective Presidents to what degree they interfere into international issues. And it seems that the Czech Republic is very often gifted with such personalities.

Both Vaclav Havel and Vaclav Klaus, former Presidents of the country between 1989-2003 and 2003-2013 respectively have made a huge influence on the Czech foreign policy. Based on his anti-communist background Havel has established the foundations of Czech foreign policy based on the promotion of democracy, human rights and Euro-Atlantic integration. Nevertheless, Klaus to a certain extent changed this course by taking a strong EU-sceptic sentiment and a much more pragmatic approach toward Russia.

Among other rights, the Czech constitution empowers the President to sign international treaties, which right was fully utilized or “misused” by Klaus, who only agreed to approve Lisbon Treaty after months of stalemate and upon some derogation given by the EU. During the stalemate, Klaus have denied to deliver the will of the reigning Czech government and both two Houses.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, Klaus has clashed with the government on the issue of Kosovo’s independence, the Russian-Georgian conflict.<sup>90</sup> Klaus’ controversial presidential activity is a clear

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<sup>87</sup> Michal Koran, "The Political Context and the Making of the Czech Foreign Policy in 2007–2009," *Czech Foreign Policy in 2007–2009* (2007), 21.

<sup>88</sup> Constitution of the Czech Republic, Kořan, Czech Foreign Policy, 30.

<sup>89</sup> Koran, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Koran, 30-32.

demonstration how much a strong-minded and active president, even with relatively weak formal powers, could influence foreign policy.

This “double-track” foreign policy did not change after the departure of Klaus (March 2013), as current president Milos Zeman takes often extremely different lines than the reigning Czech government. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is one of the demonstrative examples. Zeman is a very experienced Social Democrat politician serving as party chairman for almost a decade and four years as Prime Minister before getting elected as President. Zeman developed mastery in party politics, ready to take up conflicts, has a strong personality and ready give voice to his opinion without much considerations. In an interview given to *The Financial Times* he described his character and role in the following way: “It is more important to be a personality than a person who is in a political party. I admire personalities. Some politicians who are only great mice are just persons” adding that if the president cannot act as a politician or a “political animal” than you do not need presidents.<sup>91</sup>

Zeman dismissed the Ukrainian conflict as a “civil war” and has denied any Russian military presence in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>92</sup> This line stood in contrast to the government’s position, who said that at least 5000 Russian soldiers deemed to be in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>93</sup> Zeman has also publicly spoken out against the use of economic sanctions on Russia, which was adopted with the approval of the Czech Social Democrat government.<sup>94</sup> Zeman has criticised Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk as being a “war premier”, and has suggested that Ukraine should undergo a process of “Finlandisation” and placate Moscow politically, much as Finland is accused of doing during the Cold War.<sup>95</sup> When the planned ride of the Night Wolves, a motorbike group close to Russian President Vladimir Putin became a political issue in the Czech

<sup>91</sup> Peter Spiegel, “Czech president takes swipe at Europe’s ‘great mice,’” accessed 31 May, 2015,

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0ea52962-237c-11e3-98a1-00144feab7de.html#axzz3bhHw6gDM>

<sup>92</sup> Henry Foy and Christian Oliver, “Czech president Milos Zeman in war of words over Russia stance,” accessed 9 May, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b0f5c6a2-adfc-11e4-8188-00144feab7de.html#axzz3ZfF4JEY1>

<sup>93</sup> “Conflict in Ukraine is civil war, not Russian invasion – Zeman,” accessed 21 May, 2015, <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/conflict-in-ukraine-is-civil-war-not-russian-invasion-zeman/1119687>

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Foy and Oliver, “Zeman in war of words,”

Republic, on the one hand the Deputy Prime Minister Pavel Belobrádek talked about zero tolerance against the group, on the other hand Zeman saw no problem and called the reactions hysterical.<sup>96</sup>

More recently, Zeman's declared intention to participate in the military parade on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Day of Victory in Moscow on May 9 – which was going once again against the EU mainstream position - provoked US 'condemnation and a public debate. Following U.S. ambassador Andrew Schapiro's criticism of the planned trip, Zeman banned the US diplomat from the Prague Castle - the seat of Czech heads of state. Zeman said that he won't let any ambassador to have a say about his foreign travels and that he can't imagine the Czech ambassador in Washington giving advice to the American president's travels.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile the Czech government distanced itself from Zeman's decision and pressured him to abandon his participation in the parade by threatening to deny the approval of his trip to Moscow.<sup>98</sup>

No surprise that western commentaries harshly criticize Zeman, calling him a puppet or mouthpiece of Putin.<sup>99</sup> Similarly to the above cases, the Czech government has had to revoke Zeman's statements regarding China and human rights as well.<sup>100</sup> A Czech diplomat recently said to *The Financial Times* that "Image-wise this is a problem. He is completely overboard, and it gets reported as the Czech position."<sup>101</sup>

It also has to be added that conflicts between Sobotka and Zeman on Ukraine has party political reasons as well. Zeman had a stormy departure from the Social Democrats and formed

<sup>96</sup> "Zeman: Nothing bad about Night Wolves' ride," accessed 9 May, 2015, <http://www.praguepost.com/czech-news/47298-zeman-nothing-bad-about-night-wolves-ride>

<sup>97</sup> "Zeman: U.S. ambassador has closed the door," accessed 10 May, 2015, <http://www.praguepost.com/czech-news/46615-zeman-u-s-ambassador-has-closed-the-door>

<sup>98</sup> "The Presidents official visits have to be approved by the CZ government," accessed 9 May, 2015, <http://www.praguepost.com/world-news/46781-zeman-won-t-attend-may-9-military-parade-in-moscow>

<sup>99</sup> "On Velvet Revolution's anniversary, a reinforced commitment to democracy," accessed 9 May, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/on-velvet-revolutions-anniversary-a-reinforced-commitment-to-democracy/2014/11/21/5830e5ce-6f54-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/on-velvet-revolutions-anniversary-a-reinforced-commitment-to-democracy/2014/11/21/5830e5ce-6f54-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html)

<sup>100</sup> During his trip to China Zeman said that he did not go to China to teach lessons on human rights but, on the contrary, to learn ways to stabilise society. This statement has provoked harsh criticism and the Czech Foreign Minister had to clarify its own position.

"Prague to further speak about human rights with China – ForMin," accessed 9 May, 2015, <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/prague-to-further-speak-about-human-rights-with-china-formin/1141724>

<sup>101</sup> Foy and Oliver, "Zeman in war of words,"

his leftist Civic Rights party in 2009 which weakened the positions of the Social Democrats in the upcoming elections. Later, Zeman signalled support for the conservative Topolánek government, again violating the interest of the Social Democrats. Earlier, despite the fact that Zeman was the official candidate of the Social Democrats in the presidential election in 2003 against Klaus, along with other Socialists MPs, Sobotka did not vote for Zeman. More recently Sobotka has said in the Social Democrats party congress that Zeman is harming Social Democrats since 2003.<sup>102</sup>

### ***3.6 Pro-Russian elite networks***

Unlike in the case of Hungary, the current Czech governing elite has strong ties to Russian intellectuals and business figures which undoubtedly influence Czech politics in general, Czech-Russian relations and the government's stance on Russia.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Czech communists are indispensable part of the Czech political landscape. Though they were never invited to any governments, the Czech Communist Party is a mid-size party, adsorbs about 10-15% of the popular votes and with this result it is far the strongest Communist party within the CEE region. Therefore they presence significantly reduces political coalition alternatives for other parties. The party is proud of its communist past and “tightly connected to Russia and Russian/socialists sensibilities” and is regarded as the mouthpiece of Russia.<sup>103</sup> As media reported the party's head, Vojtech Filip was listed as collaborator of the Czechoslovak state security. Communist politicians and party members participated on various pro-Russian events and organized anti-Western political actions since the Ukrainian crisis, like in Prague against anti-Russian sanctions.<sup>104</sup>

As indicated earlier, the second strongest party in the government is ANO 2011, an anti-establishment formation, whose founder, leader and current Finance Minister Andrej Babiš was

<sup>102</sup> “Zeman harming Social Democrats since 2003 - PM Sobotka,” accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/zpravy/zeman-harming-social-democrats-since-2003-pm-sobotka/1187758>

<sup>103</sup> “Russia has opened up another front in the Czech Republic,” accessed May 10, 2015, <https://osteuropastudien.wordpress.com/>

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.



also a former member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Media reports claim that a high percentage of persons in his close circles are “silovikis” (i.e. connected to police agencies), whom formerly studied at Communist cadre schools and were members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Many of them are also suspected of having worked for the Czechoslovak Security Service.<sup>105</sup> At the same time, Babis is also involved in court proceedings in Slovakia, as he sued the Slovak Nation’s Memory Institute who identified him as collaborator for the Czechoslovak state security.<sup>106</sup>

The other leading figure in Czech politics who has also worrying connections to Russian persons close to Putin is the Czech President Zeman. One his closest advisers are Martin Nejedly, head of Russian Lukoil’s main subsidiary in the Czech Republic. Another important figure close to Zeman is Miroslav Slouf, a lobbyist, who brokered the deal for Lukoil to supply Bratislava airport with fuel. Both persons have strong ties to Moscow and they were the primary financiers of Zeman’s presidential campaign and remained part of his close advisers.<sup>107</sup>

Another important figure from Zeman’s circle is Russian national Vladimir Yakunin, president of Russian Railways, who was one the firsts listed in the US sanctions lists following Crimea’s annexation<sup>108</sup>. Yakunin served as a senior Soviet diplomat at the UN in 1985-91 and he has long been rumoured to have KGB links.<sup>109</sup> According to *The Financial Times*, in September 2014, Zeman participated at an event organized by Yakunin on which the Czech President “gave a 17-minute speech in fluent Russian denouncing EU and US sanctions against Moscow, and referring to the war in eastern Ukraine as a bout of ‘flu’”. At the event Zeman also called Yakunin a “long-time friend.”<sup>110</sup> In January 2015, Yakunin participated in a Holocaust conference

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Courtney Weaver and Neil Buckley, “EU and US sanctions list: profiles of the targets,” accessed 10 May, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/20092c52-af91-11e3-a006-00144feab7de.html#axzz3ZfF4JEY1>

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Foy and Oliver, “Zeman in war of words,”

in Prague, which was organized by European Jewish Congress, presided by Russian billionaire Moshe Kantor, who allegedly has also close links to Putin.<sup>111</sup>

To no one's surprise, upon Zeman's visit to Moscow on the side-line of the Day of Victory commemorations, Zeman brought the well-connected Nejedly with him for the talks with Putin and after Zeman met Yakunin as well. During the visit, Putin praised Zeman saying that "there are still politicians in Europe who are able to express their opinions directly and defend their stances."<sup>112</sup>

It is of course difficult to prove to what extend these figures influence Russia policy in the Czech Republic, but the fact that a lot of Czech politicians and officials close to the government are in a way connected to the former communist party, the Czech communist secret service or Putin, seems a valid but very worrying factor.

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<sup>111</sup> "Blacklisted Russian Yakunin is at Holocaust conference in Prague," accessed 10 May, 2015, <http://praguemonitor.com/2015/01/27/blacklisted-russian-yakunin-holocaust-conference-prague>

<sup>112</sup> "President Zeman meets Putin in Moscow," accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://www.praguepost.com/world-news/47693-president-zeman-meets-putin-in-moscow>

## CHAPTER 4

### LEADERSHIP, PRAGMATISM, ENERGY PRICES - THE HUNGARIAN CASE

This chapter aims to present the most relevant internal factors that influenced the Hungarian position on the situation in Ukraine. This part of the thesis intends to demonstrate that the neorealist presumption is not applicable for the Hungarian state behaviour due to various reasons. First and foremost (1) the Ukrainian crisis was not perceived as a security threat by the Hungarian government which (2) remained very critical on the sanction regime employed by the EU. This chapter aims to demonstrate that this position has evolved as a result of (3) Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's leadership and (4) the government's pragmatic foreign policy agenda; and was strongly influenced by (5) the question of energy prices (6) and the special situation of the Hungarian minority in Ukraine.

While revealing the importance of these factors, I intend to show why neorealism fails to provide an appropriate explanation on the behaviour of Hungarian foreign policy and demonstrate that second and first-level analysis is crucial in understanding the foreign policy orientation and decisions of a given country.

It also must be noted, that beyond the examined factors, there are naturally other important elements which influenced the Hungarian position on Russia. These include the public opinion of the Hungarian society; historical relations; some specific economic relations and the Hungarian far-right Jobbik's attentiveness to Russia. However, due to space restrictions these issues could not be examined in this study.

#### ***4.1 Declining military budget***

Similarly to the Czech case, Hungarian military spending has been standing much below the required 2% GDP NATO commitment ever since the country joined NATO in 1999. Along with other CEE states, Hungary was also subject of constant NATO and US criticism to increase

military budget which intensified due to the Russia's aggression.<sup>113</sup> The Hungarian government did not respond to such calls and made no specific commitment to increase military budget in the short term, but emphasized that there is a mid-term government programme to raise defence figures from 2016 onwards. The Hungarian government also signed the NATO Summit's declaration in Wales, pledging to reach the 2% of GDP share on military in the future.

However, regardless of the military conflict in Ukraine, incidents between NATO and Russia and NATO calls to increase defence budget even in the short term, the Hungarian government failed to respond to such developments. The Hungarian military budget for 2015 has witnessed a drop from 0,79% to 0,75% share of GDP from 2014 to 2015.<sup>114</sup> Similarly to the Czech case, the governing parties had other preferences in the 2015 state budget with a focus on expanding allowances for families, pay rises for teachers and the expansion of the public work programme.<sup>115</sup>

This phenomenon is one of the most demonstrative evidence that the Hungarian government did not perceive the situation in Ukraine as a threat to the country's security. This lack of concern over security goes fully against the neorealist expectations and therefore we have to have a look what factors stand behind this attitude.

#### ***4.2 Strong leader, united government and strong Parliamentary majority***

Unlike in the case of the Czech Republic, contemporary Hungarian foreign policy-making did not suffer from constitutional, governmental or party political constraints. According to the legislative framework foreign policy belongs fully to the competence of the government in Hungary. The President only has a representative role and unlike Zeman in the Czech Republic, current Hungarian President János Áder is a political ally of Viktor Orbán. Áder does not pursue

<sup>113</sup> "NATO summit: Obama, Cameron urge allies to ramp up military spending," accessed 31 May, 2015, <http://rt.com/uk/184244-nato-military-spending-increase/>

<sup>114</sup> Jonathan Beale, "Nato defence spending falls despite promises to reverse cuts," accessed, 23 May, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-31619553>

<sup>115</sup> "Parliament adopted 2015 Budget in Hungary," accessed, 30 May, 2015, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-for-national-economy/news/parliament-adopted-2015-budget-in-hungary>

any personal goals and does not challenge the strategic foreign policy goals of the government, therefore he did not play a relevant role on influencing the foreign policy of Hungary during the crisis.

Although the current centre-right government is formulated by two parties - the conservative Fidesz and the centre-right Christian-Democrats, these parties are identical and the government face no major divisions between the coalition members on strategic issues. Regardless the fact that there is a strong pro-Trans-Atlantic camp within Fidesz, their criticism remains marginal and it so far did not employ major influence on the position on the Ukrainian situation.

The same applies to the National Assembly. The government has a close to 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority in the Parliament, and it is not concerned about being challenged for foreign policy mistakes by the opposition. The only mid-term headache for the governing parties could be the far-right Jobbik party, which openly seeks the friendship of Putin and allegedly receive political and financial support from Moscow.<sup>116</sup> Although general elections are three years ahead, Jobbik's popularity is on the rise (Jobbik has recently won a by-election in Western Hungary) and thus the Hungarian centre-right government has to pay increased attention to their politics. Nevertheless, Jobbik had no real influence on the Hungarian position on Ukraine although from time to time they attacked the government to exert more pressure on Ukraine in support of the Hungarian minorities in Ukraine.<sup>117</sup> In contrast to the Hungarian far-right, the Hungarian left is totally dispersed and besides having close ties to some US-backed networks, their role was also marginal in the formulation of the Hungarian approach on the Ukrainian situation.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> In May 2013, Kremlin-connected right-wing Russian nationalists at the prestigious Moscow State University invited Jobbik party president Gabor Vona to speak. Vona also met with Russia Duma leaders. Jobbik characterized the visit as "a major breakthrough" which made "clear that Russian leaders consider Jobbik as a partner." Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Putin's Western Allies," accessed, May 31, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-25/putins-western-allies>

<sup>117</sup> See the respective section of this chapter.

<sup>118</sup> However, through some US-backed channels, they allegedly tried to influence the foreign policy of the government.

Nevertheless, what does play a defining role in the creation of foreign policy is Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. He is a veteran politician and has been in the political frontline for more than 25 years, since 1989. Orbán is well-known on his decisiveness, outspoken style and readiness to take political conflicts both at domestic and European level. As the incontestable leader of a centre-right in Hungary, Orbán has the final word on all major decisions. This also applies on foreign policy matters: foreign strategy and the crucial foreign policy decisions are made by Orbán.

Without presenting a detailed profile on the Hungarian premier - many already did - what has to be stressed that Viktor Orbán's personality, 25-year long political experience, perceptions and style is an indispensable determining factor of Hungarian foreign policy-making including. This naturally applies to the government's stance on Ukraine as well. Due to its outspoken style and the increased media attention toward Orbán, the Hungarian government's position is generally much more visible in the European political arena than others. Due to this feature, the official Hungarian position on Ukraine was often perceived as the "most pro-Russian" stance among the 28 EU states regardless the fact that - as analysts claim - Hungary's stance was very similar that of Germany or Austria.<sup>119</sup>

#### ***4.3 Pragmatic foreign policy agenda***

Another very significant factor in Hungary's position on Ukraine was the government's new foreign policy agenda. In the last years, the current cabinet has continuously implemented a major shift in the foreign policy orientation of Hungary. Traditionally Hungary's foreign policy strategy stood at three main pillars: Trans-Atlantic integration; enhanced (V4) cooperation in Central Europe; and a strong emphasis on the protection of Hungarian minorities' rights within the Carpathian-basin. Since the change of government in 2010, another element was inserted into

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<sup>119</sup> István Gyarmati, "Hungary: Singled out by the Critics," in *A Region Disunited? - Central European Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Europe Policy Paper, (February 2015), 22.

the country's foreign policy goals, which after a few years became dominating among all others, i.e. economic diplomacy.

In 2011, the government has launched the “Eastern Opening” policy aiming to foster economic relations toward Eastern (non-Western) markets. The policy was fuelled by the recognition that Hungary's strong bonds to Western markets made the country's economy one-sided which caused difficulties during the long-lasting economic crisis of the EU. Besides this, the centre-right government aimed to take advantage of the rise of the third world and expand Hungary's export activities to new markets. Trade and export has been generally one of the most significant pillars of the Hungarian economy since the 1990s. In 2013 its volume was equal to 89% of Hungary's yearly GDP, one of the highest among EU28.<sup>120</sup> In accordance with the above, diversification and intensification of trade became one of the most important strategic goals of the government's economic policy and thus it has become the focal point of the new Hungarian foreign policy.

To mark this shift, the Foreign Ministry was renamed to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in 2014. Diplomats' daily routine has changed significantly and emphasis was placed on economic matters instead of classic diplomacy. This also meant a change of focus from values to interests. The process was very similar to Sobotka's government, which initiated its new foreign policy agenda in the same spirit as Fidesz.<sup>121</sup> The Hungarian policy shift was reiterated by Orbán during the yearly diplomatic corps meeting in 2014. In his speech Orbán said that he “would take a more pragmatic approach in foreign policy as he seeks to boost Hungary's economy rather than pick partners based on the values they represent.”<sup>122</sup> Of course, being a huge market, Hungary's second biggest import and tenth biggest export partner, Russia gained distinguished attention in

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<sup>120</sup> “Exports of goods and services (% of GDP),” accessed, May 17, 2015, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.EXP.GNFS.ZS>

<sup>121</sup> See the respective section in Chapter 3.

<sup>122</sup> Margit Feher, “Hungary's Orban Moderates Foreign Policy Stance,” accessed, May 17, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/hungarys-orban-moderates-foreign-policy-stance-1408987160>

the Eastern Opening policy of Hungary. Putin and Orbán met three times in the last two years, where they discussed mainly economic, energy and trade matters.

This economic pragmatic dimension of the Hungarian foreign policy became very visible during the Ukrainian crisis. The European sanctions and Russia's counter-measures have also damaged the Hungarian economy, and it went against the government's efforts to intensify economic growth and export. Although Russia's share was only 3,1% (about 2,5 billion EUR) in the Hungarian export in 2013, Hungarian economy has suffered the fifth biggest damage within the EU.<sup>123</sup>

Orbán has made it clear on several occasions that he opposes economic sanctions against Russia as "they are contrary to Hungary's national interest" and as they "hurt [Europe] more than they do Russia."<sup>124</sup> Once he also stated that the sanctions policy pursued by the West is like "shooting oneself in the foot."<sup>125</sup> He also made clear that "because of their history, the Baltic states and Poland can only look at [their relations with Russia] as a security issue" but for Hungary it is an economic matter.<sup>126</sup> This was a clear expression that Orbán did not regard the Ukrainian situation as threat to Hungary's security but as a problem which hinders Hungary's trade relations and economic recovery.

Nonetheless, relations with Russia did not only have importance for the immediate effects of the sanctions on the Hungarian economy, but due to the various energy issues concluded between Hungary and Russia. By arguing against the EU's economic sanctions in general, Orbán has set the first frontline in the protection of the government's various energy deals with Russia.

What is important to stress that the foreign policy shift of the Orbán-government, i.e. employing a pragmatic, business-oriented foreign policy, has a very important impact on the

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<sup>123</sup> Hungarian diplomatic source.

<sup>124</sup> "Sanctions are causing more damage for Hungary than Russia," accessed, May 17, 2015, <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/news/sanctions-are-causing-more-damage-for-hungary-than-russia>

<sup>125</sup> "EU 'shot itself in foot' with Russia sanctions - Hungary PM," accessed, May 31, 2015, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/eu-shot-itself-in-foot-with-russia-sanctions-hungary-pm-1.1897971>

<sup>126</sup> Margit Feher, "Orban Moderates Foreign Policy Stance,"



position on Ukraine. This position and Orbán's calls to eliminate sanctions goes against neorealist expectations, which would assume that small CEE states support a joint policy with their allies against an aggressor in their close neighbourhood.

#### ***4.4 Energy prices - A political issue***

Hungarian foreign policy is largely intertwined with the question of energy. The security of energy supplies has become the focal point of state priorities since the mid-2000s as a response to the numerous Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes out of which many led to the disruption of natural gas flow toward CEE countries. This situation has provoked calls for a new approach focusing on energy security and the diversification of supplies. This new thinking has resulted in the launch of various grandiose plans including the EU-backed Nabucco and the Russia-backed South Stream pipeline projects.<sup>127</sup>

The question of security of gas supplies has key relevance for Hungary and the all-time Hungarian governments regardless of colour. Firstly, natural gas is the prime energy source in the country contributing 37% of the total energy mix: the third highest rate within EU28 and by far the highest among CEE countries.<sup>128</sup> Secondly, natural gas fuels almost entirely the heating sector and has a 31% share in the electricity sector.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, 80% of natural gas supply is imported exclusively from one source – Russia - and exclusively through one country - Ukraine.<sup>130</sup> This situation makes the country extremely exposed to Russian gas and the Ukrainian transit route. Regardless of some progress on the enlargement of the domestic strategic gas storage capacities and construction of gas interconnectors toward Slovakia and Romania – there is a general

<sup>127</sup> Due to various difficulties and disputes, both two projects ultimately failed.

<sup>128</sup> Data refers to the average rate between 2008 and 2012.

European Commission, "Member State's Energy Dependence: An Indicator-Based Assessment," *Occasional Papers 196*, (June 2014), 6.

[http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/occasional\\_paper/2014/pdf/ocp196\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2014/pdf/ocp196_en.pdf)

<sup>129</sup> European Commission, Energy Dependence, 8

<sup>130</sup> Data is based on Eurogas data from 2012. "Russian Gas Supplies to Europe: the Likelihood, and Potential Impact, of an Interruption in Gas Transit via Ukraine." accessed May 12, 2015, <http://gpf-europe.com/forum/?blog=energy&id=157>

understanding within the Hungarian political elite that in lack of regional gas production capacities and LNG transport infrastructure – the country’s extreme dependence on the Russian natural gas could not be reduced in the mid-run. Hungary thus is pursuing a twofold strategy: She pursues security of supplies by building gas interconnectors toward Western markets on the one hand but also trying to keep good relations with the Russians.

But energy is not only a big deal for Hungary because of the country’s exposure to Russian resources. The question of energy prices have always been an important domestic political issue, as Hungarian households – especially the ones with lower incomes - pay a high share of their revenue on utility costs. As a way to ease household financial situation and raise its popularity, the Orbán-government introduced 25% energy price cost cuts in recent years, which became one of the most important campaign topics in 2014 and ultimately contributed significantly to the re-election of Fidesz. As the natural gas is supplied by Russia, Moscow’s role in the Hungarian political sphere has become much more significant. Energy prices thus have become politicized more than ever before and due to Hungary’s dependence on Russian gas the question of energy prices gained significant external relevance.

In the CEE region, the base price for natural gas is traditionally set and sealed by long-term agreements between Russia and European states. For Hungary, the current gas contract was made in 1995 and was set to expire at the end of 2015. The agreement had a take-it-or-pay clause and due to the significant fall in domestic gas consumption, Hungary has accumulated about a 22 billion cubic metres unused natural gas obligation toward Russia. Based on the clause, Hungary would have been obliged to pay about 3 billion EUR or about 3% of its GDP to the Russians for the unused gas.<sup>131</sup> Although this scenario looked unrealistic, obligation to pay even smaller parts of the unused quota would have surely caused a political crisis as its cost should have been

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<sup>131</sup> Lóránt Dékány, “Ezermilliárdot spóroltunk Putyin bejelentésével (Hungary has saved a thousand billion with Putin’s announcement,” accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.napigazdasag.hu/cikk/36366/>

included into the energy bills of the households.<sup>132</sup> In addition to this, after the closure of the current agreement, a new long-term gas deal has to be concluded with the Russians in the coming years. As the new contract will determine the new base gas prices as well, it will undoubtedly have a huge influence on the reigning government.

It is thus no surprise that one of the prime goals of the Hungarian government was to avoid paying any compensation and possibly seek for a new gas deal with favourable prices. Following a set of consultations, the agreement was made and sealed by Orbán and Putin in Budapest, February 2015. Putin's visit took place amid harsh criticism from Hungary's European and NATO allies as Hungary was the first NATO country Putin visited since the Maidan revolution a year ago.<sup>133</sup> The meeting between Orbán and Putin resulted in the resolution of the unused gas quotas. Based on the agreement, Hungary was released from paying the approximate three billion EUR financial obligation and the parties agreed that no new agreement is required until Hungary used its current quotas.<sup>134</sup>

Among other relevant energy relations with Russia, the deal on the expansion of the nuclear plant in Paks with Russia, and Hungary's support for the Russian-backed natural gas pipeline through the Balkans (first the South Stream, currently the Turkish Stream) has to be mentioned. Both projects are multi-billion investments and Hungary conducts intense campaign for their support. Due to space restrictions, these issues will not be elaborated in this study, but it is important to stress that these two cases are important example to demonstrate that Hungary is conducting intense business relations with Russia on various matters amid strong Western criticism and pressure.

These cases show that business and political interests often overwrite the expected alliance behaviour. Hungary is a NATO and EU member and it is implementing the joint EU

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<sup>132</sup> In 2013, the first Borisov-government in Bulgaria had to resign due to protests sparked by the rise of energy prices.

<sup>133</sup> "Putin Visit to Hungary Shows He Still Has Friends in Europe," accessed, May 19, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/02/16/world/europe/ap-eu-hungary-putins-visit.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/02/16/world/europe/ap-eu-hungary-putins-visit.html?_r=0)

<sup>134</sup> Paul Sonne and Margit Feher, "Putin Offers Hungary Natural-Gas Deal," accessed May 12, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-warns-on-weapon-deliveries-to-ukraine-1424207946>

sanctions against Russia. Based on this setting, Hungary would not be expected to have such a friendly relationship with Russia and conduct various high-value business contracts with Moscow in the middle of a serious security crisis in its close neighbourhood. However, Hungarian behaviour shows the opposite. Again, it seems that economic pragmatism, business and political interests have overwritten the assumed alliance behaviour and neorealist expectations.

#### ***4.5 Hungarian minority in Ukraine - A moral responsibility***

There is another important issues, I wish to highlight with regard to the Hungarian government's position on Ukraine, i.e. the situation of the about 160 thousand strong Hungarian minority in the Sub-Carpathian region in South-West Ukraine, close to the Hungarian border. One of the pillars of Hungary's foreign policy is to protect Hungarian minority's rights within the Carpathian basin since the 1990s. This principle is also incorporated into the Hungarian Constitution and there is a cross-party consensus within the Hungarian political arena to support the Hungarian minorities' efforts for equal linguistic and cultural rights.

The Maidan revolution and Russia's military moves have affected the daily lives of Hungarian minorities in the Sub-Carpathian region. Members of the Hungarian community are also enlisted and they also face severe economic difficulties. But there was another issue which created concern within the community: One of the first actions of the newly established Ukrainian government was to revoke the country's language law adopted in 2012. The law allowed the country's regions to use more official languages in addition to Ukrainian. Thirteen out of Ukraine's 27 regions, primarily in Eastern Ukraine adopted Russian and two Western regions introduced Romanian and Hungarian as official languages due to the law in the previous years.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> "Cancelled language law in Ukraine sparks concern among Russian and EU diplomats," accessed, May 31, 2015, <http://rt.com/news/minority-language-law-ukraine-035/>

Though the withdrawal of the law by the new Ukrainian government has targeted the Russian minority, it also affected the Hungarian community. The Ukrainian move provoked strong criticism not only from Russia but from Western and Hungarian politicians as well.<sup>136</sup> In his inauguration speech following his re-election, Viktor Orbán reiterated the government's support for Hungarian minorities by saying that "Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin have the right to dual citizenship, community rights and autonomy."<sup>137</sup> Later Orbán reasserted his remarks several times.

Orbán's statement created once again strong international criticism and protest from Ukraine blaming him to destabilize the region and creating ethnic tensions. The Ukrainian government has summoned the Hungarian Ambassador in Kiev and Orbán was attacked to play from Putin's playbook.<sup>138</sup> Hungarian rhetoric was unfortunate in particularly due to the fact the Putin's legitimized his actions in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea in order to protect Russian nationals.

The state of Hungarian minority remained an essential issue between Ukraine and Hungary as Hungarian politics followed the developments in Ukraine and the steps taken by the new Ukrainian government. However, the more Hungarian politicians called for the respect of the minority rights of the Hungarian community, the more it has become under fire for undermining the stability of the fragile Ukraine. Due to moral responsibility and Fidesz' commitment to the cause of Hungarian minority, leading Fidesz politicians have often made critical statements which externally sound as if the Hungarian government was trying to undermine the Ukrainian government and cooperate with Russia using the minority card.

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<sup>136</sup> "Scrapping language law could question new Ukrainian admin's democratic commitment, says foreign ministry," accessed, May 31, 2015, <http://www.politics.hu/20140225/scrapping-language-law-could-question-new-ukrainian-admins-democratic-commitment-says-foreign-ministry/>

<sup>137</sup> "PM Orban calls for autonomy for ethnic Hungarians beyond borders", accessed, May 31, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/10/us-hungary-orban-idUSBREA4904X20140510>

<sup>138</sup> Eszter Zalan, "Orban upsets neighbours by call for Hungarian minority self-rule," accessed, May 31, 2015, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/124145>

Once again, due to Hungary's foreign policy doctrine and moral responsibility, the Hungarian government acted against the expected alliance behaviour and neorealist expectations.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS - CALL FOR A RENEWED FOCUS ON DOMESTIC FACTORS

#### *5.1 Failure of neorealism*

The case studies show that neither the Czech Republic nor Hungary perceived the Russian aggression against Ukraine as a major security threat. The lack of fear from external military threat is proven by the fact that neither the Czech Republic nor Hungary made any major shifts in their defence policies. Moreover, even minor drops ( $\sim 0,04\%$  of GDP) were experienced in their military spending. These phenomena totally contradicting to the voices of several Western leaders including NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen who called the crisis as "the gravest threat" to European security and stability of the last 25 years.<sup>139</sup>

Although both countries aligned themselves with the joint EU and NATO positions, they remained harshly critical on the economic sanctions against Russia. Both countries belonged to the group of doves arguing for a more pragmatic approach and seek to ease anti-Russian economic measures. These positions went fully against neorealist expectations, which would assume that small CEE states support a joint policy with their allies against an aggressor in their close neighbourhood. In addition to this, both countries were seeking to deepen economic cooperation with Russia on various fields regardless of the harsh criticism of several hawkish EU states and the US. This attitude also contradicts the neorealist expectations.

The above facts show that neorealism is unable to explain the foreign policies of the Czech Republic and Hungary in response to the Ukrainian crisis. Both the Czech Republic and Hungary are weak states, hold a still vivid and negative historical memory on Russian (Soviet) occupation and are located in Central Eastern Europe, close to the crisis. Still, these countries did not perceive the situation as a threat: they did not pursue a security-seeking foreign and defence policy, but a pragmatic one ignoring the pattern provided by neorealism.

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<sup>139</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Russia's moves in Ukraine are 'wake-up call,'"

As the Ukrainian crisis should be an easy test for the neorealist theory, this is in fact a huge blow for its advocates. As there are states in the region which confront its rules, it means that neorealism cannot be the dominate concept on analysing Ukraine and its aftermath and what it holds for the region. Therefore a much wider and deeper approach shall be taken by scholars to explain small CEE states' foreign policy choices.

### ***5.2 A justified call for a broader approach in foreign policy analysis***

Against the expectations of neorealism, the case studies show that neither the state of the Czech Republic nor Hungary could be regarded as a sole and independent actor of foreign policy, but as an institutional structure, within which various players, such as political parties, strong individuals are interacting with each other. They all follow their own agenda based on various and diverging economic and political interests. These interactions and clashes of interests are later lead to a certain outcome, a foreign policy decision or strategy employed by the respective state. Both case studies prove this claim, i.e. domestic actors, their actions and interests have a crucial role in the foreign policy-making.

It was demonstrated in both case studies that the foreign policy orientation of a government determines the framework under which it conducts its international affairs. Both the Czech and the Hungarian government have established a pragmatic foreign policy agenda focusing on economic diplomacy. This policy was fully reflected in the way these countries responded to the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The Czech case shows how much the foreign policy pursued by the state depends on the actual state of party politics. In the Czech political landscape, parties' foreign policies and approaches on Russia are very colourful and due to the Czech electoral system - promoting coalition-type government structure, - this diversity is often reflected in governmental politics. With the Social-Democrat-led coalition government with the inclusion of ANO 2011, a rather pro-Russian pragmatic line was taken as the Czech official position. However, in case of a



hawkish centre-right-led coalition government, the foreign policy outcome would have been the opposite.

The Hungarian case was different from the Czech example. Due to the internal party political and governmental settings, the prime foreign policy actor was Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister. His actions were not a question of dispute and his decisions were unchallengeable both within the party and the government. The lack of strong internal opposition nevertheless empowered him to uphold a strong and harsh position on the Ukrainian crisis intact and provided a broad scope to express it actively both at the local and international level. In the Czech political arena, where both party and governmental politics are fragile – a situation also rooted in the constitutional and electoral system - we found a much more modest way of communication and external interactions. All these show that internal institutional and political settings, party politics do matter when it comes to foreign policy.

The case studies also showed that strong leaders and the way they conduct international relations do have a major effect on foreign policy outcomes. The Czech case shows how much constitutional settings with an ambiguous foreign policy role could provide the opportunity for strong-minded and active Presidents to stir up a country's foreign policy orientation. Zeman's strong pro-Russian stance has created a very uncomfortable situation for the Czech government and made the Czech position on the Ukrainian crisis very confusing. It is also important to stress, that such situation possibly could not have occurred without Havel and Klaus' very active presidencies, which serve as a point of references for all-time Czech Presidents. This shows that constitutional settings, political tradition and ultimately strong presidents have a determining role in foreign policy-making.

As it was also indicated in the case studies and above, personal background, skills, perceptions and style also did play a role in the evolvement of the positions on Ukraine. Both Zeman and Orbán are strong-minded, outspoken veteran party politicians. Their personal background and skills made them vocal and visible foreign policy actors both internally and

externally. The findings of the case studies show that first-image analysis thus does have a justified role when assessing small state foreign politics.

In the case of the Czech Republic we have seen how much Russia is still present through personal channels and business relations. Although it is hard to prove to what extent Zeman has been influenced by his pro-Russia circles, but this is undoubtedly an issue the Czechs must cope with. Similar elite networks between influential politicians and external powers surely exist in several other cases as well. The case of Jobbik, the Hungarian far-right party and the Czech Communist Party may be a good example but the role of some US-funded active NGOs in foreign policy-making may hold interesting revelations. But other important state-level factors do exist in both in the case of the Czech Republic and Hungary as indicated in the case studies' introductions.

Even without examining all domestic factors, we could comfortably conclude that the cases of the Czech Republic and Hungary demonstrate that the domestic and individual factors - such as constitutional framework, party politics, government structure, foreign policy agenda, elite networks, certain political issues, leaders' personalities - must be examined to understand the foreign behaviour of small states.

Foreign policies of small states are the result of a very complex external and internal political environment, actors, interests and interactions. Second and first level approaches do have a legitimate place within foreign policy analysis, even when the subjects of the research are small states and not great powers. Third-level analyse and systemic theories simply neglect essential factors which ultimately shape foreign policy behaviour, therefore their applicability shall be revisited.

### ***5.3 How to deal with CEE countries?***

Russian aggression against Ukraine shall serve as an easy test for neorealist logic. However it did not pass the reality test for the Czech Republic and Hungary. This shows that

systemic factors alone are not sufficient to provide the framework to analyse and understand small states' foreign policies. The "scholarly consensus" on the applicability of neorealism for explaining small state behaviour therefore has to be challenged.

Scholars often regard the national political arena as a less relevant factor for foreign policy outcomes. Party politics and national agenda however, do determine how a country shapes its foreign policy and manages its international relations. Take two recent examples: Syriza's victory in Greece and the Tory's triumph in the UK. The politics these forces pursue to a large extent seem to disregard the logic what systemic constraints would assume. And still, their policies are ultimately shaping not only these countries' future but the face of whole Europe.

Internal political outcomes could not be understood from the outside, the rigid international arena. Even a simple police interrogation could lead to the fall and rise of regimes and trigger sweeping revolutions. The Arab Spring holds such revelations and this finding is valid for the two case studies as well: dynamics of internal societal and political processes cannot be excluded from the toolkit of foreign policy analysis.

But if small state internal settings are - by nature - so diverse, this may hold another important revelation: What if the normality for small states' behaviours is, due to the extreme complexities of their internal settings, is determined to be different? What if the expectedly similar foreign policy outcomes for small states based on grandiose concepts, like neorealism is the abnormality? What if the normality for small states foreign policy behaviour is instead, diversity? And as domestic factors, actors, agendas, issues, interests, obviously differ, normality and rationality advocates that foreign policy outcomes must differ as well.

Nevertheless, the lack of interest by the academic society to understand the real dilemmas and factors behind foreign policy decisions of small states is more than unfortunate, as it could hold disastrous surprises. Foreign policy scholars failed to predict the fall of the Soviet Union, the eruption of the civil war in Yugoslavia, the Arab Spring, and identify the alarming signs coming from Ukraine before the Maidan revolution. These mistakes shall not be repeated: We have to

see below the surface of the Central European chessboard. And as the case of the Czech Republic and Hungary showed, these states' black boxes hold indispensable and exciting internal factors which cannot be disregarded.

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