
Chapter 15

Sub-Saharan Africa in Czech Foreign Policy

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FROM AN INTEREST IN AFRICA TO INTERESTS IN AFRICA?¹

Back to Africa, but too late. This was the conclusion of the chapter devoted to Czech foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa in the *Yearbook of Czech Foreign Policy* of the Institute of International Relations in 2012.² Last year's yearbook asserted that Czech foreign policy – in spite of budgetary austerity measures – had bounced off the bottom and attempted a “return to Africa”, which was, however, coming with a considerable delay. In 2013, this trend continued, characterized by the effort to deepen relations with traditional African partners, establish new relations or re-establish relations that had been put on ice. This effort was manifested in a 7% growth of Czech exports to the region. In a situation when the economic recession is still being felt in Europe, while Africa is experiencing record levels of economic growth, the awareness of the importance and possibilities of the African economy is growing faster than the crisis-struck foreign-policy tools of the Czech Republic may react. Most importantly, however, this interest in Africa is beginning to be felt by wider segments of Czech society, not merely the foreign policy actors, but gradually also foreign policy makers. It affects not only the media, but also the very companies that are seeking to expand their markets. The imported, but largely well-founded “Africa on the rise” fashion was, for example, also reflected in the employment of the term *Emerging Africa* in the names of both of the large and abundantly attended events organized by the MFA in 2013 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Pan-African organization on the opportunities for Czech business on the African continent.

Last year's yearbook also stressed that the relations between the Czech Republic and the fifty countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, which are motivated predominantly by economic interests, would probably not see any unexpected twists and turns, due to the gradual increase in the volume of mutual trade. In 2013, this was amplified by the suspension of the strategy making process at the MFA as a result of the fall of the right-wing government and the appointment of the caretaker government. One of the rather exceptional moments in the course of the year was when Sub-Saharan Africa (after several years) became the subject of political debate and polarization, because

of the deployment of Czech troops in Mali as a part of the European Union Training Mission (EUTM Mali) in the beginning of the year. It was peculiar to the African agenda that the right-wing government of Petr Nečas, including Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, framed the dispatch of a military contingent to Africa only indirectly, by its security aspects and the contribution to the EU mission. In addition to the inevitable politicization of the event, as it was necessary to have it approved by parliament, the foreign military engagement also became the first case of polarization of the Czech foreign policy towards Africa since the debate on the closing down of some of the Czech embassies in Africa in 2010. A significant part of the leftist opposition in Parliament took a stand against the mission. However, the message of the growing awareness of Sub-Saharan Africa in the political sphere, was relativized by the opposition's criticism that the Czech Republic had no national interests in Mali, where the export of a single Czech company amounted to one billion CZK annually.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The Fall of the Right-wing Government and a Break in Strategy Making on Africa

The analytical and conceptual framework that was heralded in 2012 and entitled *A Strategy of the Relations between the Czech Republic and the States of Sub-Saharan Africa* waited for approval by the leadership of the MFA just like the other strategies of the Ministry focusing on regions outside of Europe. The work on the African strategy was, however, brought to a halt after the taking of office by the caretaker cabinet of Jiří Rusnok and the new and former Foreign Minister Jan Kohout in July 2013. However, soon after the constitution of the political cabinet of Prime Minister Bohumil Sobotka, Foreign Minister Luboš Zaorálek and the new MFA deputy ministers in the beginning of 2014, it was apparent that the work on the strategy will not be resumed. Due to the “political renovation”, there would be a review of the basic strategy documents of Czech foreign policy on the basis of an analysis of Czech foreign policy to be carried out in 2014.

A draft version of the strategy as of December 2012 was submitted to consultation to a closed, but relatively broad community of stakeholders, including academia. As it was, it represented a snapshot of the strategy of the Czech African policy as conceived by the relevant ministerial department and the section headed by Deputy Minister Tomáš Dub. In line with previous foreign-policy strategies, it defined Czech interests in Sub-Saharan Africa, including in particular the strengthening of Czech export, contributing to human rights and a democratization of the region, its economic development and, last but not least, committing to the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU (CFSP) in the region. The Czech involvement in the CFSP was supposed to increase the prestige of the Czech Republic. The last point of the document foreshadowed the arguments in favour of an unprecedented Czech military involvement in the EU mission in Mali, at least in terms of the deployed troop numbers. The docu-

ment also repeatedly stressed that the growth in export cannot be achieved through a common representation of the EU in the region, but only via bilateral policy tools, a bolstered network of embassies, including less expensive forms of representation. This point was reflected by the inauguration of a small embassy office in Dakar by the end of November 2013.

Leaning on contemporary trends, the document described the current situation in Sub-Saharan Africa as the “*so-called African miracle*”. However, at the same time it identified the challenges that the continent was facing.³ In some respects, however, the document remained too vague or unbalanced. For example, it devoted one full paragraph to topics such as Czech support for local culture, the same space as was given to the priorities of the Czech Republic in the EU policy towards Africa. As regards trade and the economy, the document in great detail identified priority sectors for the Czech industry and the annex listed priority countries for the Czech Republic to focus on. In addition to traditional target countries where the Czech Republic has currently or at least recently had a diplomatic mission (South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Congo-Kinshasa, Senegal and Zimbabwe), the strategy suggested Gabon, Rwanda and Tanzania as new priority countries. It was not the ambition of the document, however, to present a common position of the government, incorporating, for example, the view of the Ministry of Industry and Trade (MPO). Thus the available version of the working document – taking into account all existing constraints of the unfinished and unapproved document – only represents the view of one ministry.

The Politicization of Sub-Saharan Africa by the President, the Political and the Caretaker Cabinet

As the chapter on Africa already observed in the 2007 yearbook, the importance attached to a marginal foreign-policy agenda, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, to a certain extent depends on the individual personalities in charge of the Czech state administration. Let's take, for example, the nearly four-year period of responsibility for the non-European agenda by Deputy Minister T. Dub, who was appointed to this post at the MFA with no previous diplomatic experience. According to some views from inside the MFA, the positive side of his term was the high intensity of bilateral visits and the development of new contacts rather than strategy making. In addition to changes in the staff, the return of J. Kohout to the post of Foreign Minister meant made possible the use of his experience with African partners from his previous engagement at the MFA. Finally, the ascent of Miloš Zeman to the presidency, might cause an increased interest in Africa, although this has not yet been borne out by his conduct. It seems that the current president puts even more emphasis on economic diplomacy and export diversification than his predecessor, which should bode well for the African agenda. The key factor, however, seems to be the filling of the post of the director of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Office of the President by Hynek Kmoníček. Kmoníček gained experience with the African agenda as the former director of the then Department of Africa and the Middle East, which he led until 1999, whereupon he briefly served as Senior Director of the Section of Non-European Countries and in 2001 even as the Deputy Minister for the Non-European agenda.

In terms of politicization, the year 2013 was from the outset dominated by the issue of the Czech contribution to the mission in Mali, which was supported by the President, but primarily in the context of a relentless fight against international terrorism.⁴ In the beginning of the following year, he even claimed that being the commander in chief of the armed forces, he would not oppose a Czech participation in an anti-terrorist mission in the Central African Republic.⁵ Otherwise, the participation in the Mali Mission was framed primarily by the argument of contributing to the CFSP, subscribed to even by the otherwise euro-sceptical Prime Minister. As was admitted by the chief of staff, Petr Pavel, the priority had for a long time been the military participation in NATO missions, but recently the army was seeking “a more balanced approach”.⁶ This was indicative of the end of the exclusiveness of the transatlantic partnership and the emphasis on the EU, manifested after the formation of the social democratic coalition government in early 2014. Former Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg even repeatedly warned that by not contributing to the Mali mission, the Czech Republic would lose its credibility, becoming a “*non-trustworthy EU member state*”.⁷ This step of the right-wing government of P. Nečas was, however, a largely pragmatic move, intended to improve (judging by the time sequence) the Czech position in the negotiations on the EU budget in a situation where the Czech Republic had acquired the reputation of a troublemaker in the EU.⁸ In addition, the linking of the training of the Malian army to its arming, was supposed to make it possible for the Czech army to get rid of its assault rifles, the submachine gun of the design No. 58.⁹ They were to replace the outdated Czechoslovak submachine guns from the 1980s, which were allegedly still being used in the country.¹⁰ However, no weapons were delivered to Mali in the end.

It was characteristic for the president-backed caretaker government of J. Rusnok, which did not win the confidence of the Parliament, that the only politically discussed as well as publicized (even abroad) subject related to Sub-Saharan Africa was the vulgar statement of the Prime Minister about his reluctance to travel to Johannesburg for the funeral of Nelson Mandela. The funeral was finally attended by Minister of Foreign Affairs and the then Prime Minister of the Czech Republic spent the evening in Pilsen at a football match.¹¹ However, in this case, as well as in other cases, the political debate was not framed by the foreign-policy relations with South Africa, but more generally in terms of ethics.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: AGENDA AND EVENTS

Political Relations

The main driving force of the relations with Sub-Saharan Africa remained primarily the MFA. The slowly increasing interest in political issues on the African continent was illustrated for example by the growing number of MFA statements relating to this region. While in 2012, the MFA did not issue any statement regarding this region because it felt no need to underline or complement the statements of the High

Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in 2013, four statements were issued. In March 2013, the MFA positively assessed the peaceful course of the elections in Kenya.¹² In September, it condemned the terrorist attack by al-Shabaab on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya.¹³ In line with its human-rights agenda, the Ministry published a November 2013 statement on the case of Zimbabwean human rights defender Beatrice Mtetwa.¹⁴ The main event of the end of 2013, however, was the death of Nelson Mandela on 5 December, to which the MFA reacted the following day by issuing a condolence to the Mandela family and the South African people.¹⁵

Czech Visits to Sub-Saharan Africa

The year 2013 was busy in terms of foreign visits and meetings between Czech political leaders and the representatives of African countries. On 13–18 October 2013, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Kohout, accompanied by thirty representatives of Czech companies, visited South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda and Ghana.¹⁶ One of the motives of the visit was to change the often stereotyped perceptions of Africa and in particular to point to its economic potential. In the case of South Sudan and Rwanda, this was the first-ever official visit by a representative of the Czech government to these countries. In this context, during his meetings with the representatives of the South Sudanese government, the Minister offered to provide specific technical support for streamlining development projects in the country.¹⁷ In Rwanda, the Minister discussed the possibilities of Czech companies to participate in construction, energy and agricultural projects. The Czech Republic has a very good reputation in Rwanda, dating back to the year 1994, when the Czech Republic was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and Ambassador Karel Kovanda was the first one to call the genocide in the country by its name and urged for its speedy solution. A memorandum of understanding and cooperation was signed between the Lidice Memorial and the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre.¹⁸ In Uganda, a memorandum of understanding was signed as well, providing the ground for the holding of regular bilateral consultations on political issues. In Ghana, which is the fifth largest Czech trading partner in Africa, the Minister discussed mainly the possibilities for deepening economic cooperation.¹⁹

An important and widely publicized event of the end of 2013 was the death of former President of South Africa and a distinguished fighter against the apartheid, N. Mandela. President Miloš Zeman and the President of the Senate, Milan Štech, signed the condolence book at the South African Embassy in Prague. After the Prime Minister had declined to travel to South Africa, Foreign Minister Kohout took part in the commemorative event at the FNB Stadium in Soweto in Johannesburg and on the next day, he paid homage to Mandela's earthly remains, exhibited at the seat of the President and the Government in the Union Buildings in Pretoria.²⁰ On this occasion, Minister Kohout visited the newly established Holocaust and Genocide Centre in Johannesburg, to which he promised assistance with the installation of children's drawings from the Jewish ghetto in Theresienstadt.²¹

Minister Kohout was not the only member of the Czech government, who visited Africa in 2013. On 18–19 September, Defence Minister Vlastimil Píček attended the

inauguration of the new Malian President Ibrahim Keita Boubakar. His visit was motivated by the effort to establish a broader cooperation with the Malian government in the area of security.²² At the end of the last decade, the Czech government tried to sell the superfluous L-159 fighter aircraft to Mali and its efforts to sell the “specials” to Sub-Saharan Africa continues.

Several visits to Africa were also made in 2013 by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, T. Dub. Already in the beginning of January, he travelled to Benin, where he discussed a number of specific activities of Czech enterprises, especially in the areas of health and mining.²³ On 2–6 April, Dub was accompanied by the representatives of the Ministry of Finance, the Czech Export Bank (ČEB), the Export Guarantee and Insurance Corporation (EGAP) and Czech export-oriented companies on his visit of three countries: Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan. In Uganda and South Sudan, the business meetings attended by representatives of the Czech companies and their local counterparts were held.²⁴ In Sudan, in addition to discussing the economic relations between the two countries, the issue of the Czech claims was also raised.²⁵ In July 2013, Deputy Minister Dub made a visit to the Gulf of Guinea, where he visited Nigeria, Gabon and Cameroon, which is the largest economy in Central Africa. The most discussed topic in all these states was again the deepening of mutual economic cooperation. In Nigeria, Dub addressed not only economic issues but also touched on political and security questions.²⁶

Visits of African Partners in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic was also visited by the political representatives of the African states. In November, the Minister of the Interior of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Abba Patrick Moro, travelled to the Czech Republic, where he met with Deputy Minister Dub and consequently, on 19 November discussed with Interior Minister Martin Pecina security issues and issues of police cooperation.²⁷ In December 2013, Minister of Foreign Affairs Kohout met his counterpart from Botswana Phandu T. C. Skel-emani.²⁸ At the highest level, President Zeman invited his Nigerian counterpart Goodluck Jonathan for a state visit at the end of 2013. However, as of the time of writing, the visit has not yet been carried out as it proved to be difficult to set a mutually convenient date for the visit.

The meetings of Czech and African leaders would also take place at the level of ministerial deputies. On 1 October 2013, Deputy Minister Dub met with his counterpart from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Together, they discussed not only the cooperation in economic diplomacy, but also the issue of security in the region of the Great Lakes that is plagued by long-standing instability.²⁹ The South African Deputy Foreign Minister, Marius Fransman, who visited the Czech Republic in May, expressed his interest in cooperation in the area of university education and the Deputy Minister of Education of Nigeria was also interested in the area of vocational training.³⁰ A number of meetings between Deputy Minister Dub, government officials and diplomats from African countries and representatives of international organizations also took place in the context of the Septem-

ber 2013 conference East-West Business Forum. At the parliamentary level, a meeting was organized between the member of the Senate and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DRC, Raymond Ramazani Baya, and the first Vice-President of the Senate, Alena Gajdůšková, in September 2013. In June 2013, the President of the Nigerian Senate, David Mark, visited the Czech Republic, which represented the highest official visit from Nigeria in the history of the mutual relations.³¹

The position of an important political partner of the Czech Republic to the south of the Sahara Desert continues to be occupied by Ethiopia. On 9–10 December 2013, the regular annual Czech-Ethiopian political consultations took place. The Ethiopian delegation led by State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Berhane Gebre-Christos, and the Czech delegation led by Deputy Minister Dub, discussed the issues of economic and development cooperation, the security situation in the Horn of Africa and the possibilities of cooperation in international organizations.³² Despite the limited amount of provided development aid, the Czech Republic is perceived as a positive donor – in particular the provided scholarships are highly appreciated by the Ethiopian side. Economic relations, however, remain weak and the potential of the good political relations, forming a precondition for the development of economic relations, is not being fully utilized.

Other Events

In 2013, Africa celebrated the half a century anniversary of the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the predecessor to the African Union (AU). The celebrations of the founding of the pan-African organization were not limited to the African continent. To pay tribute to this anniversary, on 3 June 2013, the MFA in collaboration with the Institute of International Relations and the African States' embassies in Prague organized a panel discussion under the auspices of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg. The panel discussion was attended by speakers like the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, T. Dub, or the AU Ambassador to the EU, Ajay Bramdeo. The panel discussion highlighted the positive image of the Czech Republic in Africa, which was created in the past due to the provision of technological and military aid. The discussions also repeatedly touched on the current good relations with African countries, mainly focusing on economic diplomacy and development cooperation. One of the panels was held in the spirit of the motto "Africa Rising" and the speakers in particular stressed the economic potential of African states, the positive political and economic changes that have taken place in Africa since the end of the Cold War, and the need for increased investment in human capital in Africa. The Czech Republic, which is not burdened by colonial history and is currently a member of the EU, should play a unique role in the further development of African countries.³³

Czech representatives also attended events of international organizations. For example, in the end of August 2013, a Czech delegation led by Deputy Minister for Regional Development, Michal Janeba, attended the meeting of the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe) and Livingstone (Zambia). The political contacts were complemented by a meeting of the Czech honorary

consuls in Prague in November, which was made possible thanks to financial support of the EU.³⁴ Finally, in 2013, Deputy Minister Dub also met with the non-resident African Ambassadors in Vienna, Berlin and London.

Security Relations and Military Missions

In the area of security, the Czech Republic has been increasingly adhering to EU policy and has been participating in international missions of the EU and the UN. In 2013, the most important mission with Czech participation was the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), which represents the response to the worsening security situation in the country that had taken place in 2012. The dispatch of Czech troops to Mali was first pre-negotiated between the Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg and his French counterpart Laurent Fabius. The security threats in the Sahel region were perceived by the Czech Minister as “*a direct threat to the security interests of the Czech Republic*”, and the involvement in the EU military mission was also presented as an opportunity to “*make sure we have enough influence on the future course of the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU*”.³⁵ In this context, on 12–13 February, Minister of Defence V. Pícek attended the informal meeting of Defence Ministers in Dublin, which was devoted mainly to the EU Training Mission in Mali and furthermore to the anti-piracy mission in Somalia.³⁶

The proposal to send 50 soldiers of the Czech Armed Forces to Mali in the context of the EU training mission with a mandate of 15 months in the course of 2013/2014 was adopted by the Czech government for the first time on 6 February 2013.³⁷ On 13 February, the resolution was amended by extending the mandate to “*provide training to the armed forces of Mali*” and also “*provide protection to the forces of the states involved in the EUTM Mali*”.³⁸ The government’s proposal was at first discussed by the Parliament’s Defence Committee. In its resolution from the 13th session of 14 February 2013, the Committee recommended the deputies to approve the deployment of the Czech troops in Mali.³⁹ The government proposal was subsequently discussed at a plenary session of the Parliament on 19 February. During the plenary debate which lasted an hour, Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg described the impact of the terrorist organizations’ actions in Mali as a “*direct threat to the security interests of the Czech Republic*”.⁴⁰ Critical voices speaking out against the government proposal were in particular the Communist Party’s (KSČM) deputy Alexander Černý, or Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) deputy Dana Váhalová, who stressed that the purpose of the Czech military was to defend Czech territory. In a similar vein, other ČSSD deputies also expressed their reserved attitude towards the possibility of sending Czech armed forces to Mali.⁴¹ Finally, however, it was possible to pass the government proposal by a majority of 130 votes. 19 Communist deputies, 12 ČSSD deputies and two non-affiliated deputies voted against the proposal.⁴² Unlike the government-coalition parties and the Communists, the ČSSD, which was the strongest left-wing opposition party, did not vote unanimously on this government proposal. In the Senate, the proposal was supported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security⁴³ and was subsequently approved at the plenary session on 13 March by a majority of

61 votes.⁴⁴ In the spring, a contingent of 50 Czech soldiers was dispatched to Mali, where they were tasked with guarding the EUTM headquarters in Bamako. The second rotation of the Czech troops was supposed to be involved also in the training of the Malian troops. A general problem of the Czech engagement in West Africa, however, was that the Czech soldiers rarely spoke French. The EU mission in Mali did not only have a military dimension, but was also significant in terms of providing development and humanitarian aid in Mali. In this context, in May 2013, Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimír Galuška attended the Donor Conference for Development in Mali in Brussels, where he discussed the possibility of providing aid for the years 2013 and 2014.⁴⁵ The Czech Republic, however, contributes only to humanitarian aid in non-priority countries. In 2013, Czech humanitarian aid amounted to 3 million CZK.⁴⁶

The possibility of the deployment of Czech troops to the training mission in Mali polarized the Czech political scene. During the discussions of the issue in the parliamentary defence committee, the Communist Party opposed the government's proposal on the grounds of a lack of legitimacy of the transitional Malian government, which had sanctioned the intervention. The Communists were also at odds with the definition of the mandate for the activities of the Czech contingent.⁴⁷ The deputies of the KSČM thus did not support the proposal because it represented an interference with the "*internal affairs of a sovereign state*". The Communists held that the mission did not relate "*to the Czech Republic's national interests*", was costly (135 million CZK per year) and allegedly exceeded the mandate given by the UN Security Council Resolution No. 2085. It also aroused the suspicion of the Czech Communists of supporting the French "*power interests, mainly the control over the immense mineral resources of the region*".⁴⁸ In contrast, the Social Democrats as a whole voted for the government proposal, because of a "*legitimate risk of a base for international Islamic terrorism being created close to Europe*", even though it led to a split between the ČSSD deputies.⁴⁹

Even though the Mali mission was the biggest, it was not the only mission in which Czech soldiers were deployed on African soil. Three servicemen of the Czech army continued to be stationed at the headquarters of the EU-NAVFOR ATALANTA mission, which is mandated to protect the vessels off the Somali coast and to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the UN World Food Programme (WFP) in Somalia.⁵⁰ Three Czech military observers also participated in a UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which was established by the Security Council in 1999 and whose task it was to monitor the political, security and military situation in the country and work towards ensuring peace for the local population. The Czech Republic also participated in the solution of other security issues within the European Union. Particularly relevant for 2013 was the situation in Somalia. A Czech representative participated in the conference "New Deal for Somalia", held on 16 September in Brussels. Finally, the Czech Republic was also involved in finding solutions to the unstable situation in South Sudan, Nigeria, Mali and the Central African Republic.

Economic Relations

In general, however, the security and political problems of a number of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa do not present a barrier to trade. The increased awareness of the economic potential of Sub-Saharan Africa was manifested in a 7% rise in Czech exports in 2013. Czech export to African countries was growing at more than double the rate of the exports to the rest of the world, including the European Union. In absolute terms, Czech companies exported goods worth 16.7 billion CZK to Africa in 2013, which was 1 billion CZK more than in the previous year. Czech imports from Africa, on the contrary, dropped for the first time since the beginning of the global crisis by two percent and did not exceed the expected level of 10 billion CZK. The trade balance thus registered a record surplus of 72%. Trade with the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa remained unevenly distributed. The share of South Africa in Czech exports to the region was almost 60%, totalling approx. 10 billion CZK, from a share of approx. 25% and 3 billion CZK at the outset of the new millennium. However, it has to be kept in mind that the trade with South Africa also includes a part of the trade (re-export) with Namibia, Zimbabwe and some of the other countries of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU).⁵¹ In fact, the share of the largest Czech trading partner in Sub-Saharan Africa might actually be even lower, as a part of the imports to Sub-Saharan Africa are shipped in via Turkey (e.g. textile machines) or China (other technological equipment).⁵²

In 2013, Nigeria overtook South Africa as the continent's largest economy by changing the method for calculating the GDP, which thus almost doubled overnight. Nevertheless, the actual market opportunities for Czech exporters are smaller in this country and the economic structure less favourable for the Czech industry, which is borne out by the fact that Nigeria only imported Czech goods worth less than 1.5 billion CZK. The 1 billion CZK threshold was also exceeded by Czech export to Mali. However, this country practically only serves as an outlet and a transfer hub to other countries in the region for the "African brocade" of the Broumov-based company VEBA. Other countries to reach the mark of 0.5 billion CZK worth of Czech exports are Senegal, Angola and Kenya. Good news for the Czech Republic was in particular the dynamics of the commodity structure. Since 2000, the export of consumer and chemical products increased approx. five times, the export of machinery and transport means with a higher added value grew even tenfold, while the food exports increased only minimally. Machinery and transport means represented three-quarters and two-thirds respectively of exports to South Africa and Nigeria. They also represent the majority of the *success stories* of the export to the region, generally considered as difficult, and the growth of the above-stated statistics.

Among the significant orders as of recently, it is possible to mention the supplying of brewing technology by the firm ZVU POTEZ for Ethiopian Raya Brewery for half a billion CZK (almost equalling to the total turnover of the company in the previous year).⁵³ The company has begun to orient itself more towards "exotic markets", as traditional markets are reportedly saturated and provide only little opportunities but renovation of existing equipment. After alleged problems with the Indian supplier, the company and its German partner might even get involved in the construction of a re-

finery in Eritrea.⁵⁴ Thanks to the contact to a former government scholarship holder, the company Knights from Dolní Břežany was able to supply a production line for an army shoe-making factory, which was built in the 1960s by Czechoslovakia in Kumasi, the second largest city of Ghana.⁵⁵ Hutní montáže, a company from Ostrava was awarded a contract for the installation of a boiler in a coal-fired power plant in the south-African province of Mpumalanga.⁵⁶ The company Puro-Klima participated in a tender for the construction of two regional hospitals in Gabon.⁵⁷ Finally, the company Olomouc Sigma was planning to supply its pumps to Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁸

In the period since 2000, the import of raw materials from Sub-Saharan Africa has increased threefold (only the rubber imports from the Ivory Coast and Liberia and aluminium imports from Mozambique exceed 0.5 billion CZK), however, the import of food, beverages and oils has decreased. The rest of the import increase was mainly represented by the industrial products from South Africa, especially machinery and products for further processing, such as textile fibres and metals. With the exception of South Africa and in particular Mauritius, which has seen a tenfold growth in clothing exports to the Czech Republic amounting to half a billion CZK and representing an African *success story*, the Czech Republic has been importing only raw materials and semi-finished products with low added value from Africa. On the contrary, Czech exports to Africa predominantly include products with high added value, such as machinery and automobiles. Thus the Czech-African trade relations have retained a postcolonial character and it was by no means a coincidence that the Czech Republic was ranked among the states of Europe and the USA with a colonial approach to Africa. This also applied to the perception of the Czech Republic by its most important trading partner, South Africa.⁵⁹ South Africa has demonstrated a shift towards the BRIC countries and away from Europe. However, its plan to revoke its bilateral agreements, among others also with the Visegrad countries, has not yet impacted the Czech Republic.

In terms of the economic development of Africa, it was discouraging to see that in its Sub-Saharan part, not a single direct investment from the Czech Republic was carried out (unlike in Egypt), not even in South Africa with its stable business environment. There were reports of tens of millions of CZK invested in pond-restoration projects in Congo-Brazzaville, again mediated by the former government stipend holder.⁶⁰ On the contrary, South Africa is the owner of foreign direct investment in the Czech Republic. If we take into account that there were 78 new untraceable owners of Czech businesses based in the Seychelles only in the first half of the year, the official balance is significantly in favour of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁶¹ This paradox highlights the key problem of the flight of finances from the African continent. While the MFA paid for case studies promoting investment, which it had also repeatedly presented, these are, however, associated with the interests of specific Czech companies and so far brought no tangible results.⁶²

In order to support Czech-African trade, the MFA together with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) on 25–26 September 2013 organized the East-West Business Forum entitled “Emerging Africa”.⁶³ This was already the second year of the conference and the event took place under the auspices of Prime Minister Rus-

nok, Foreign Minister Kohout, Minister of Industry and Trade Cienciala, Minister of Agriculture Miroslav Toman and First Vice-Chairman of the Senate Přemysl Sobotka. The title of the conference hints at the rediscovery of Africa by Czech companies, who realized the economic potential of African markets and the rapid economic growth in African countries. The conference was attended by 400 representatives of businesses, NGOs and the governments of 25 countries from all over the world. The theme of the conference was primarily business opportunities in Africa, trade and investment and the role of government initiatives in them. The conference was also attended by the representatives of Czech companies successfully exporting to Africa, but predominantly to the states of the Maghreb. It remains to be seen, however, if the MFA and the MIT can carry on this symbiosis in economic diplomacy into the future after the advent of the new government in 2014. The economic dimension of Czech foreign policy and the international development cooperation with Africa are dealt with in more detail in the respective chapters of this book.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN CZECH FOREIGN POLICY: IDENTIFYING AND CHARACTERIZING THE KEY ACTORS

In terms of the organizational structure of the MFA, there were no changes relating to the agenda of Sub-Saharan Africa. The Ministry abandoned the plan to merge the Department of Sub-Saharan Africa with the Department of the Middle East and North Africa because of the ongoing differentiation of the agenda. The Department of Sub-Saharan Africa continued to be led by Pavel Řezáč, newly deputized for by the former Ambassador in Abuja, Jaroslav Siro. After the leaving of Senior Director of the Section of Non-European Countries, Daniel Koštoval, to the post of Deputy Minister of Defence, however, this post remained vacant, being only briefly held by Václav Bálek, who later became Political Director. The post of the respective Deputy Minister was held in the last year of his service by Tomáš Dub. The renewed interest in Africa could also be seen in the gradual, albeit relatively slow increase in the number of the embassies in the region. In 2013, there were six Czech embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa. On 27 November, the embassy in Dakar was reopened in a building leased from Austria. The entire mission consists of only one diplomat – the Head of the Mission Lenka Pokorná, who is at the same time *chargé d'affaires* for Senegal, and a local official.

Kenyan Nairobi continues to serve as the seat of an office of the embassy in Addis Ababa. The diplomat is the permanent representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). In the summer of 2014, however, it is expected that the embassy in Nairobi will be reopened as Kenya is perceived to be one of the stable countries in East Africa, and is thus a suitable target country for Czech exports. Back in April 2013, however, the residence in Nairobi was the only building that the MFA offered for rent.⁶⁴ After the closure of the fully-fledged office in Nairobi, however, it became apparent that the embassy in Addis Ababa was overburdened by its

responsibility for the twelve states of East Africa. It seems that after the breaking of the taboo of closing down embassies in the EU, the era of austerity measures and of the closing down of embassies in overseas territories has come to an end.

The agenda of East Africa is covered by the embassy in Addis Ababa. In previous years, the construction of a new building for the mission was announced, however, it has been postponed for the time being. Given that the mission head is also in charge of the AU agenda, he participated in the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the OAU that took place in the AU Commission headquarters in Addis Ababa. The embassy in Accra, Ghana, is accredited for nine West African countries. Its main agenda focuses on the deepening of the mutual economic relations with the West African countries, which are among the most rapidly growing in Africa. In addition, Ghana has traditionally been seen as an important economic partner on the African continent. The region of Central and West Africa is also partly covered by the embassy in Abuja, Nigeria. In addition to promoting the mutual economic relations with the countries of the region and especially with Nigeria, as was evidenced by the opening of an office of the Czech-Nigerian Trade and Investment Council in December 2013⁶⁵, the embassy was also involved in development projects, focusing mainly on education.⁶⁶

The Czech embassy in Harare, Zimbabwe, continued to focus in particular on the promotion of human rights and the monitoring of the regime of President Robert Mugabe. In this context, the MFA issued a statement on the above-mentioned court ruling in Harare of 26 November 2013, which acquitted the human rights defender Beatrice Mtetwa of the charge of obstructing the administration of justice.⁶⁷ In July 2013, President Mugabe was re-elected to office. The sanctions directed against him appeared to be ineffective and are also being used by the Zimbabwean regime for propaganda purposes. Although without a revocation of the government resolution, the embassy in Harare is supposed to be closed down, it seems that the decision will eventually be abandoned.

In addition to the existence of the Czech embassy in Pretoria, a system of collocation has been kept in existence in South Africa. Since 2010, a so-called Visegrad House exists in Cape Town, where the representatives of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland rotate on a weekly basis. The Visegrad House is mainly used for consular affairs, but has been involved, among others, also in cultural events and activities to promote economic development. The economic importance of South Africa for the Czech Republic is also evidenced by the fact that Johannesburg is the only city in Sub-Saharan Africa to have a CzechTrade office.

In addition to the permanent diplomatic missions in African countries, the accredited representatives of the Czech Republic also attended the summits of the regional African organizations, such as the *Economic Community of West African States* (ECOWAS) or the *South African Development Community* (SADC).

Due to the concentration of Czech foreign policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa at the MFA with only exceptional overlaps to other executive or legislative bodies, these are dealt with throughout the other sections of this chapter.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND THE MEDIA

The year 2013 confirmed the trend of the previous year and more than ever before in the past, Africa attracted media attention and was depicted as an important region of the world, offering new export and investment opportunities for Czech companies. Successful projects such as the construction of the brewery in Ethiopia or the activities of companies like Veba Broumov in particular caught the interest of the media and were used as examples of the economic potential of the region.⁶⁸ The reporting on Africa did not only cover specific business cases, but also described the newly discovered African potential in more general terms. A number of these articles used telling subtitles and were often introduced to the debate by foreign actors.⁶⁹ The diplomats themselves, who have long-standing personal experience with the region, also partly contributed to a change in the perception of Africa.

However, public diplomacy only played a random role in straightening the distorted media image of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁷⁰

The image of the African states in the media was not always positive, which was to a certain extent given by the ongoing conflicts on the continent. The most publicized issue in this context was the proposal of deploying Czech soldiers in the EU mission in Mali.⁷¹ By the end of 2013, the media were increasingly releasing reports from the Central African Republic (CAR), where violence broke out between Muslim Séléka militias and Christian anti-Balaka armed groups after a coup had toppled the government in March 2013.⁷² The violence resulted in a large-scale exodus of refugees to the surrounding countries and an escalation of the humanitarian situation in the CAR. The media interest was also aroused by the deteriorating security situation in Somalia, which forced the humanitarian organization *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) to leave the country.⁷³

Widely discussed in the media was also the deteriorating health, subsequent death and persisting legacy of former South African President and anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela. The focus of the media predominantly revolved around the issue of the representation of the Czech Republic at the commemorative ceremony in Johannesburg. Not only the Czech, but also the foreign media all over the world reported on the notorious private conversation between the then Prime Minister in demise, J. Rusnok, and Defence Minister V. Píček.⁷⁴

The crime columns of Czech and South African media continued to be dominated by the case of Radovan Krejčíř, who had been accused of attempted murder and kidnapping in South Africa and his property was sequestered due to tax evasion.⁷⁵ The extradition of Krejčíř to the Czech Republic was complicated by the fact that he had applied for asylum in South Africa. Although his application had been rejected, he filed an appeal and the appellate procedure was on-going at the time of writing. Even though this case has steadily attracted the main attention in relation to the Czech Republic in South Africa, the Czech Ambassador in Pretoria explained that it did not affect the mutual relations.⁷⁶ The media also informed about Czechs, who became vic-

tims of Nigerian crime. One of the victims pressed charges against the six Nigerian scammers in Ghana.⁷⁷

The media also devoted attention to projects of “animal diplomacy”.⁷⁸ These included for example the ongoing activities with the aim of protecting the Lord Derby eland in Senegal.⁷⁹ Another project of the Prague ZOO was realized under the title “Tramp Bus”.⁸⁰ The project aims at educating Cameroonian children by visiting rescue stations for primates where these children should familiarize themselves with the gorillas in order to get to know them better and create a sort of an appreciation for them. In a broader sense, the project aims at the curtailing of commercial hunting of wild animals for meat in the Dja National Park. Animal diplomacy is well positioned to pave the way for Czech firms to the African continent, as was evidenced by a Czech company that supported the efforts aimed at the saving of an endangered parrot species because it wanted to acquire a concession for gold mining in Benin.⁸¹ On-going were also the charitable activities in the Czech Republic, taking the form of collections of objects of daily use, such as glasses, bicycles or even tractors.⁸² Unlike private initiatives, however, it seemed that the government-sponsored activities of the development agency attracted a much lower attention, despite their disproportionately higher budget, highlighting the shortcomings of public diplomacy.⁸³

Africa also got into the focus of the Czech academic community. In April 2013, the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen hosted the “African Days” conference, which was attended by 20 Africanists from 14 countries. In addition to the popularization of Africa, the Centre for African Studies was seeking to revitalize the African studies programme and also founded the new *Journal of African History, Politics and Society*.⁸⁴ On 24–25 October 2013, Pilsen also hosted a conference entitled “Viva Africa”, organized jointly by the University of Hradec Králové and the Metropolitan University Prague, in cooperation with the civic association “Cultura Africa”. The conference attracted experts on Africa from the Czech Republic and abroad. On the occasion of the conference, the constituent assembly of the Czech Association for African Studies was held, which aims to support the development of African Studies and the presentation and popularization of its results in the Czech Republic.⁸⁵ A Czech team of archaeologists from the National Museum achieved a significant success in Sudan, when it unearthed a lost temple and later also a unique sculpture that were taken to the Prague Náprstek Museum, where it will be on display together with other items in the “Country of Black Pharaohs” exhibition.⁸⁶

The Czech embassies in Africa were also trying to promote Czech culture on the continent, for example by supporting the sixth annual European Film Festival in Nigeria, in the context of which two Czech films were screened, or the staging of the play *Audience* by former Czech President Václav Havel in a local theatre in Abuja, organized by the Czech Embassy in Nigeria.⁸⁷ The Czech Republic also participated in the European Film Festival in Freetown, Sierra Leone, which took place in October 2013.⁸⁸ The Czech Embassy in Accra, Ghana, presented to the local children Czech bedtime stories that were projected in an open air movie theatre.⁸⁹ The embassy in Harare organized the tasting of Czech cuisine and of Czech beers at the festival Yummy

Europe, which was held on the occasion of Europe Day in May 2013.⁹⁰ The Czech Centre in Zambian Choma organized an exhibition devoted to the long-standing relations between the Czech Republic and the region of present-day Zambia. In particular, the exhibition commemorated Czechoslovak explorer Emil Holub, showcased traditional Czech companies like Baťa and highlighted a number of Czech inventions.⁹¹ Vice versa, African culture in the Czech Republic was promoted by the Kafé Africa, which was opened in July 2013 in Prague by the NGO Humanitas Afrika.⁹² The Kafé's mission is to create jobs for migrants while at the same time becoming a cultural place that is close to similar undertakings in countries with a larger African Diaspora.

CONCLUSIONS

The year 2013 did not bring any fundamental changes in the Czech foreign policy towards the region of Sub-Saharan Africa. This was largely due to the fact that the Czech Republic was ruled for over half a year by a caretaker government without a mandate from Parliament. The government was thus not in a position to take fundamental policy decisions. In this context, work on the *Strategy of Relations between the Czech Republic and Sub-Saharan Africa* had been put on hold and was not resumed with the advent of the new government, which decided to undertake a reassessment of foreign policy priorities. The review of the strategy documents of Czech foreign policy by the new Social Democratic Minister of Foreign Affairs, L. Zaorálek, is scheduled to be completed in 2014. However, as the African agenda represents a rather marginal and thus more or less consensual area of Czech foreign policy, continuity with the previous government's policy may be expected. This was also borne out by the fact that even though the strategy had been put "on ice", the Czech African policy in 2013 accentuated the very interests defined in it, i.e. the strengthening of Czech exports, the contribution to human rights promotion and the democratization of the region, its economic development and, last but not least, a full-blown contribution to the CFSP of the EU.

2013 saw the continuation of the positive trend of a growing awareness among Czech businesses of the economic growth taking place in Africa, which was in stark contrast with the lingering economic crisis in Europe. The growing interest of Czech businesses in Africa was also putting pressure on the political representation to step up its engagement in the African agenda, facilitating the penetration of the African markets by Czech companies. The continued emphasis on economic diplomacy can be illustrated in particular by Foreign Minister Kohout's visit to Sub-Saharan Africa, where he was accompanied by a business delegation organized by the Chamber of Commerce. The commitment to the African agenda, however, too often depends on the attitude of the individual personalities of the Czech political scene and their previous experience with the region. The increased interest in Africa was well received by the political representations of the African states, which was evident in the increase of the number of visits of African politicians in the Czech Republic. The aim of the MFA will be to promote this positive trend in the future with the limited means at its disposal.

The emphasis on the development of bilateral relations, which particularly in Africa are very helpful for facilitating market entry, was demonstrated by the re-opening of the Czech embassy in Dakar in November 2013 and the planned re-opening of the embassy in Nairobi in the summer of 2014. In 2013, the Czech Republic managed not only to deepen its relations with traditional partners in Africa, such as Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia, but also to establish new relations with prospective economic partners, such as South Sudan because of its mineral resources or Rwanda, sometimes referred to as the “Switzerland of Africa” owing to its economic upswing.⁹³ Although the Czech Republic has traditionally had a positive image in Africa, its temporary withdrawal from the region has left its mark and complicates the current efforts to re-assert the Czech presence on the continent. The more so as the Czech Republic increasingly also has to compete with the emerging powers that have gained a foothold in Africa thanks to the deepening cooperation between the countries of the *South*. The *Emerging Africa* trend is evident not only in the discovery of “new African states”, but also in the growing awareness of the broader public, aided by a growing media focus on African affairs, as well as for example two major academic conferences on Africa held in the Czech Republic. The approach of the Czech Republic in the economic sphere is thus reactive, nevertheless neutral, and is based on a slow adaptation to the changing geometry of the global economy and the internal changes of the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2013, in addition to economic topics, political and security issues also ranked high on the African agenda. Unlike in the previous year, the MFA demonstrated a newly found activity by issuing four press releases on Africa. The most discussed issue that attracted the biggest media attention and polarized the Czech political scene was the possibility of a dispatch of Czech troops to Mali in the context of the EUTM Mali mission. Sub-Saharan Africa has long been perceived as an unstable region and its geographic proximity to Europe as a potential threat. The concerns of the Czech Republic as well as of the EU were fuelled in particular (apart from the Sahel region) by the security situation in Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia, and in 2013 also in the Central African Republic.

As far as Czech defence policy is concerned, a predominantly reactive approach may be identified, as the Czech Republic largely adhered to the EU strategy dedicated to tackling with the risks in the Sahel. The offensive approach was, however, replaced by a neutral to collaborative approach, even though the engagement in Mali was framed as an EU security, not a territorial agenda. In other cases, Czech foreign policy towards the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa continued to be characterized rather by inaction, which was caused by a continued lack of interest of the political elite and the public at large in the region. Although a reversal of this trend has already begun, accompanied by an emphasis on economic diplomacy and the establishment of new relations with African countries, the Czech Republic still lacks a clearly defined proactive policy towards the region. The Czech Republic is thus faced with the challenge of accomplishing a transition from a superficial interest in Africa (or an interest embedded in the broader framework of the EU) to the recognized interests of the Czech political and economic elites in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Endnotes

- ¹ The authors would like to thank Pavel Řezáč, and Jaroslav Siro, the director and deputy director of the Sub-Saharan Africa Department of the MFA for the interview on 16. 4. 2014 and valuable insight and comments. Thanks also go to Barbara Fialová for her help with the research and analysis of the foreign media. However, any mistakes and the interpretation and assessment of Czech foreign policy remain the sole responsibility of the authors.
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- ⁷¹ See for instance *Africká mise české armády. Senát schválil vyslání vojáků do Mali*. ČT 24, 13. 3. 2013; *Vláda vyšle do Mali 50 vojáků na rok a čtvrt, vycvičí místní armádu*. Mladá fronta DNES, 6. 2. 2013.
- ⁷² See for instance *Není to černobílý střet muslimů a křesťanů. Konflikt v SAR očima českého dobrovolníka*. Hospodářské noviny, 18. 12. 2013; *Černé srdce Afriky opět krvácí, Francie k léčbě nasadí stovky vojáků*. Mladá fronta DNES, 5. 12. 2013.
- ⁷³ *Lékaři bez hranic nuceni uzavřít všechny projekty v Somálsku*. Lékaři bez hranic, 14. 8. 2013. On-line: www.lekari-bez-hranic.cz/cz/aktuality/2013/somalsko/lekari-bez-hranic-prinuceni-zavritpo-22-letech-sve-projekty.php.
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- ⁷⁵ *Krejčíř má v JAR obstavený majetek. Daňové úřady mu zabavily domy i luxusní auta*. Hospodářské noviny, 15. 11. 2013; *Osudová rána pro Krejčíře? Úřady v JAR mu obstavily majetek*. ČT24, 15. 11. 2013.
- ⁷⁶ *Krejčířova kauza podle diplomatů nepoškozuje vztahy ČR s JAR*. Týden, 2. 12. 2013.
- ⁷⁷ *Nigerijci připravili Čecha o statisíce, ten podvodníky dostal před soud*. E15, 21. 11. 2013.
- ⁷⁸ *Tak trochu jiná diplomacie. Přes koně, slony i gorily*. Mladá fronta DNES, 4. 5. 2013.
- ⁷⁹ *Díky Čechům možná přibude v Africe antilop*. ČT24, 1. 2. 2013.
- ⁸⁰ *Toulavý autobus s Poborským vyjel na záchranu goril v Kamerunu*. ČT24, 14. 1. 2013.
- ⁸¹ *Jak antilopa, varan či slon otevírají dveře českému byznysu*. Ekonom, 23. 2. 2013.
- ⁸² *Do Afriky poputují brýle z Česka*. ČT1, Události v regionech, 24. 9. 2013; *Nakládáme! Kola zamíří za školáky v Gambii*. Mladá fronta DNES, 12. 2. 2013; *Traktory? Pracují perfektně*. 5+2, 5. 12. 2013.
- ⁸³ *Například Češi učí Zambijce, jak uměle oplodňovat krávy*. Mladá fronta DNES, 20. 12. 2013.
- ⁸⁴ *Západočeská univerzita nabídne studium afrikanistiky*. Lidové noviny, 11. 4. 2013.
- ⁸⁵ *Viva Africa. International Conference on African Studies*. On-line: www.vivaafrika.cz/history; Česká asociace pro africká studia. On-line: www.africkastudia.cz/.
- ⁸⁶ *Češi objevili v Súdánu unikátní sousoší*. Lidové noviny, 25. 3. 2014; *Čeští archeologové jsou jedničky, bodují i v Súdánu*. ČT24, 31. 1. 2013.
- ⁸⁷ MFA: *6. Evropský filmový festival v Nigérii*, 16. 4. 2013; *Divadelní hra Audience v Abuji*, 10. 6. 2013.
- ⁸⁸ MFA: *Pat a Mat ve Freetownu (říjen 2013)*, 26. 10. 2013.
- ⁸⁹ MFA: *Promítání Štaflika a Špagetky*, 31. 12. 2013.
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- ⁹¹ MFA: *Česká nej v Zambii*, 12. 4. 2013.
- ⁹² *Babylon*, ČT2, 8. 3. 2013.
- ⁹³ *Zapomeňte na genocidu a nafouknutá břiška*, op. cit.