

Czechia in First Place? Foreign and European Policy Narratives in the 2025 Elections

Vít Hloušek¹

Abstract

The article examines the politicisation of foreign and European policy in the 2025 Czech parliamentary elections through an analysis of party narratives articulated in electoral manifestos and campaign discourse. The 2025 campaign was marked by a deliberate effort of incumbent parties to increase its salience and to frame geopolitical orientation and EU membership as existential choices. Building on the literature on the Europeanisation of Czech foreign policy and on party-based foreign policy narratives, the study analyses manifestos of all parliamentary parties (ANO, AUTO, Pirates, SPD, STAN, and Together) and one relevant extra-parliamentary actor (Enough!). Using a qualitative narrative approach, the article identifies dominant narrative patterns and maps their alignment with established ideational strands such as liberal internationalism, sovereigntism, Euro-optimism, and Euroscepticism. The findings demonstrate a clear incumbents–opposition divide. Government parties articulated internationalist and Euro-optimist narratives, combining Europeanist and Atlanticist trajectories, whereas opposition parties offered more heterogeneous but generally reactive and Eurosceptic visions. The article contributes to comparative research on the domestic politicisation of foreign policy and the role of party narratives in structuring electoral competition.

Keywords: foreign policy narratives; European integration;
Czech political parties; politicisation of foreign policy

DOI: 10.5817/PC2026-3-43008

CC BY 4.0 (<https://www.creativecommons.cz/licence-cc/>)

¹ Professor at the Metropolitan University Prague, Dubečská 900/10, 100 00 Praha 10 – Strašnice, Czech Republic. E-mail: vít.hloušek@mup.cz. ORCID: 0000-0003-1153-1694.

1. Introduction

The paper examines the narratives on foreign and European policy articulated by Czech political parties in the run-up to the 2025 elections. Its primary aim is to analyse the electoral manifestos of all parties and coalitions that entered parliament (ANO, AUTO, Pirates, SPD, STAN, and Together), as well as the only extra-parliamentary party that secured at least 1.5 per cent of the vote (Enough!).

Foreign policy does not typically rank among the most intensely contested arenas during parliamentary election campaigns. Nevertheless, as the literature reviewed in the following section demonstrates, there is a discernible trend towards the increasing politicisation of foreign policy and its growing intersection with domestic political debates. This trend brings competing foreign policy narratives, articulated by political parties, into direct confrontation, as observed in the case of the 2025 Czech parliamentary elections. Several factors may have acted as facilitators, elevating foreign policy narratives to the status of priority topics in political contestation.

As research on long-term trends in party politics vis-à-vis the EU shows (Karas, 2004; Havlík, 2009; Havlík et al., 2017; Skulínek, 2021; Hloušek & Kaniok, 2021; Sychra & Kratochvíl, 2021), the EU and foreign-policy domains are typically interlinked and entangled in the perceptions of Czech political parties. As Baun and Marek (2010, p. 3) state, European integration did not change the basic perception of Czech foreign-policy orientation but contributed significantly by opening new opportunities and providing Czech foreign policy with new multilateral instruments; Czech foreign policy has therefore ‘EU-ised’. That is why we integrate both intertwined dimensions in our research.

The high degree of politicisation of European Union issues in Czech domestic politics, together with the ‘Europeanisation’ of Czech foreign policy, helps to explain why foreign policy has become a salient dimension of party differentiation. Another possible explanation lies in the general significance of foreign policy issues. As the literature (Calca & Gross, 2019; Hesová, 2025) suggests, periods of international crisis tend to increase the domestic salience of foreign policy. From a Central European perspective, the war in Ukraine constitutes precisely such a palpable and enduring crisis, the duration of which further enhances its political salience and the capacity of political parties to integrate foreign policy into their core discursive agendas.

Both assumptions—namely, politicisation and the impact of the crisis generated by Russia’s war against Ukraine—could be tested in the context of any Central European country. However, Czechia provides a third, complementary (rather than competing), explanation for why analysing party-based foreign policy narratives is essential for understanding the dynamics of contemporary political debate. The polarising effect of relations between the incumbent coalition government led by Prime Minister Petr Fiala and the opposition has

intensified political contestation more broadly. Both the 2021–2025 government and opposition parties sustained a highly polarised, and to some extent bipolar, debate throughout the 2025 election campaign. Foreign policy issues were instrumentalised by both ‘camps’ as components of predominantly negative campaigning. Voters of the governing coalition were warned that Andrej Babiš would steer the country eastwards, while opposition voters were repeatedly exposed to accusations that the government parties were uncritically subservient to ‘Brussels’ and willing to abandon the defence of Czech national interests.

Therefore, an analysis of the party narratives employed by Czech political actors in the context of the 2025 parliamentary elections offers insights that extend beyond a mere case study. It contributes to a broader understanding of the conditions under which foreign policy issues become politicised within domestic political debate.

Still, the main research question is exploratory: (1) What dominant narratives of foreign and European policy did Czech political parties employ in their 2025 electoral campaigns? This primary question gives rise to the following secondary questions: (2) How do these narratives relate to established ideational strands such as liberal internationalism, sovereigntism, Euro-optimism, and Euroscepticism? (3) How are positions on European integration narratively aligned with broader foreign-policy worldviews within party discourses? (4) What is the general pattern, the key dimensions of a conceptual map, of Czech foreign and European policy as presented in the 2025 parliamentary elections?

The paper is structured as follows. First, it develops the conceptual framework, considering the role of political parties in foreign-policy making and, conversely, the role of foreign policy in parties’ electoral appeals, and how parties construct foreign-policy narratives. The second part constitutes a literature review, providing a brief summary of existing knowledge about Czech political parties as actors formulating foreign-policy narratives. Next, data and methods are introduced. In the following section, we examine the narratives expressed in party manifestos and then consider the foreign-policy narratives developed by party leaders. Finally, we discuss the results.

2. Conceptualising party foreign policy narratives

Political parties were not traditionally central objects for scholars studying foreign- and European-policy ideas, discourses and narratives. Except for research on party Euroscepticism (see Marzi, 2025, for an extensive literature review), parties were viewed as actors minimally interested in foreign policy, and the electoral arena was seen as focused on domestic policy domains. This changed with the politicisation of European integration (Hoeglinger, 2016; Hutter et al.,

2016; Smekal & Havlík, 2023) and, subsequently, with the increasing politicisation of foreign policy. Some scholars (Kaarbo, 2015) even speak of a 'domestic turn' in studies of foreign-policy formation, given the blurring of the line between domestic and foreign policy (Raunio & Wagner, 2020 and 2024; Hofmann & Martill, 2021). Together with the traditional competence of political parties to feed into the foreign-policy discourse (Varga & Buzogány, 2021), this makes our paper relevant both to the inquiry into Czech political parties' foreign-policy preferences and to the study of the sources of Czech foreign policy more broadly.

Research on party positions on foreign and European policy and the related narratives draws theoretical foundations from discursive institutionalism. It rests on the conviction that ideas expressed by political actors matter not only as devices of communication but also as tools that enable actors to overcome existing equilibria and generate policy change (Schmidt, 2008, p. 304). Vivien Schmidt (2008, pp. 310–311) differentiates between coordinative discourse, held among politicians, and communicative discourse, used by political actors to convey their ideas and policy preferences to the public. From this perspective, foreign-policy narratives and narratives on European integration represent an important part of parties' communicative discourse.

The role of narratives in political discourse remains vital. Narratives frame politics and policy in a story-like form that is comprehensible and compelling to citizens and voters. They provide an accessible way to package policy ideas and preferences for the broader public (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). Narratives help to integrate and translate the inevitable complexity of contemporary politics (Roe, 1994, pp. 2–3). Hagström and Gustafsson (2019, pp. 389–390) stress that the role of narrative should not be limited to a communication device. They describe 'narrative power' as a normative strategy used by foreign-policy actors to persuade through storytelling. Narratives interpret actors, objectives, events, sequences and identities to create shared meaning and to legitimise policy choices (Roselle et al., 2014; Noort & Colley, 2021). Political parties' narratives therefore serve to craft official state foreign-policy narratives.

Narrative is typically defined as a 'story' (Patterson & Monroe, 1998). As Roe (1994, p. 3) reminds us, '[s]tories are not the only kind of narrative ... there are also non-stories, counter-stories and metanarratives'. Most foreign-policy party narratives conform to the concept of non-stories, because they lack a classical plot while employing important elements of storytelling. As De Wilde and Trenz (2012, p. 544) suggest, a policy narrative should be conceptualised as 'loosely rearranged signifiers, symbols and stories'. Policy narratives can, of course, contain stories, but they more typically include scenarios and arguments as well (Roe, 1994, p. 34). A foreign- and European-policy narrative can address the international system (or the EU), identity, policy, or all these aspects together (Miskimmon et al., 2018, p. 80). In the sphere of foreign policy, narrative builds the link between general political identity and foreign-policy orientation (Toettoe et al., 2024). In sum,

narratives expressed in party manifestos and leaders' statements are not mere aggregations of policy positions; rather, they are constructions of the international environment and of international policy that parties and party leaders use in campaigns to present a vision of preferred foreign policy.

Discursive institutionalism frames party manifestos as normative and legitimising narratives that explain not only the country's current situation but also the policy changes deemed necessary to improve it. Since foreign policy represented an important field of contestation between the incumbent parties of the 2021-2025 ruling coalition government of Petr Fiala (three parties of Together coalition: ODS, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09; and STAN) and the prior to 2025 elections opposition parties (ANO, SPD, Enough!, and AUTO), it is worth studying the competing narratives employed by political parties in the 2025 campaign.

3. Czech parties on foreign and European policies: Literature review

Literature review addresses two important areas. First, it summarises the state of knowledge on long-term trends in Czech political parties' foreign- and European-policy positions. Second, it identifies the most important moments and issues that have driven the increasing politicisation of foreign and European policy in Czech domestic debate. Such a survey helps construct a framework for the narrative map representing foreign- and European-policy issues in the Czech 2025 parliamentary elections.

Although Czech foreign policy has often been characterised by indetermination and paralysis (Cadier, 2019, p. 200), this does not imply a lack of interest in foreign-policy narratives as instruments of domestic political competition. On the contrary, the lack of consensus among Czech political parties on the country's vital foreign-policy interests (Marek & Baun, 2012) is a product of intense competition between diverging party foreign-policy narratives.

There is notable continuity in the major orientations adopted by actors in Czech foreign policy, including political parties. Atlanticism, internationalism, Europeanism and autonomism have represented the principal approaches to Czech foreign policy since the emergence of independent Czechia in 1993 (Drulák, 2006; Kořan, 2012; Kříž et al., 2021).

These trajectories, which indicate preferred geopolitical and economic orientations, are accompanied by a basic difference in style. Some parties defend an internationalist, active and cooperative approach; others favour an isolationist option, prioritising domestic issues and non-engagement as the best foreign-policy approach for Czechia (Hloušek & Kaniok, 2021, p. 707).

A similar continuity characterises dominant Czech positions on the European Union. An instrumental narrative of the EU – emphasising economic and

other benefits of membership rather than treating the EU as a community of shared values – has prevailed since the early years of Czech membership (Braun, 2005; Beneš & Harnisch, 2015; Hloušek & Kaniok, 2020; Cabada, 2024b, pp. 6–7). Domestic ambivalence about what Czech Europeanness entails is reflected not only in the ambiguities of Czech presidencies (described as ‘half-European’ in 2009 and ‘model European’ in 2022 – Neuman & Neuman Stanivuković, 2025) but particularly in the ongoing dispute over ‘European’ politics among political parties (Kaniok, 2025).

Turning to prevailing issues and changing salience: for political parties, European integration represented the most important domain of their foreign-policy programmes. This shifted gradually with the emergence of new threats and challenges. The Eurozone crisis drew some politicians’ attention to China as a trading partner (Kříž et al., 2021, pp. 62–63). The Russian occupation of Crimea increased awareness of traditional security issues among Czech foreign-policy makers and experts (Kříž et al., 2021, p. 54), which later influenced party narratives.

Czech parties became increasingly aware of the growing salience of foreign and European politics in response to major shifts in Czech foreign-policy orientation. Zákřavský et al. (2025) identify two critical international events that triggered changes in official Czech foreign policy: the migration crisis of 2015 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. During the migration crisis, Czech foreign policy shifted towards sovereigntist preferences and intensified Visegrád cooperation to resist EU pressure for a compulsory relocation mechanism. Following the outbreak of war in Ukraine, Czech foreign policy returned to active diplomacy, supporting the application of international law and broader cooperation within the EU and NATO.

As a result, foreign- and European-policy issues penetrated electoral campaigns well before 2025. Prior to the Russian aggression in 2022, issues related to the EU and European integration were the most salient in party disputes. It took time, for example, for the Russian occupation of Crimea to become part of the domestic foreign-policy debate, yet parties’ differing reactions to the occupation triggered further differentiation of their narratives (Holzer et al., 2020, pp. 74–82).

In 2017, migration and rejection of the compulsory relocation mechanism provoked heated electoral debate (Kovář & Sychra, 2018, p. 42; Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018) and for the far-right SPD, the prominence of the topic continued (Charvátová & Filipec, 2022). The migration issue was securitised by Czech actors and served to link preferred foreign-policy orientations with narratives of defending Czech identity and sovereignty (Tabosa, 2020, p. 19). It also contributed to the emergence of populist tones in Czech foreign-policy debate (Cadier, 2019, pp. 204–205).

Visegrád Group cooperation increased in salience alongside the migration crisis. Regardless of how fragile and agenda-dependent real cooperation among

Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia is (Eihmanis, 2024), it has become another locus for politicising party foreign-policy narratives. The interplay between Visegrád cooperation and stances towards illiberal regimes within the V4 provides opportunities to frame a Central European dimension in either liberal or illiberal foreign-policy narratives (Cabada, 2024a; Janebová & Hloušek, 2023).

The migration crisis overshadowed other EU-related topics. Brexit was not heavily politicised by Czech parties. Apart from general calls to defend national interests, only ODS used Brexit to critique a lack of national unity, and SPD defended the British decision to leave a supposedly non-reformable EU (Brusenbauch Meislová & Szent-Iványi, 2023, p. 60). In the longer term, Brexit moderated Czech hard Eurosceptic parties, who concealed prior calls to leave the EU behind rhetoric favouring a referendum on membership (Havlík & Hloušek, 2025).

Although some authors (Weiss, 2021, p. 589) underestimated the impact of Czech populist parties on and interest in foreign policy, subsequent developments disprove such assumptions. In the 2021 campaign, foreign-policy disputes featured prominently in the populist-anti-populist clash, with parties opposing populism labelling their opponents (mainly ANO and SPD) as pro-Eastern, pro-Russian and pro-Chinese (Filipec & Měšťánková, 2024). Coalition Together and Pirates plus STAN emphasised a pro-Western orientation and loyalty to the EU and NATO (Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022, p. 80).

More specifically, the far left (KSČM), the far right (SPD) and governing ANO challenged the previously predominant European internationalist mainstream, intensifying the conflict between isolationist and internationalist strategies. Only KSČM openly called for replacing Czech Western geopolitical orientation with an Eastern course (Kaniok & Hloušek, 2024, p. 403).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 generated an ‘unprecedented salience of foreign policy’ in Czechia (Hesová, 2025, pp. 149–151) and increased attention to Russia among foreign-policy makers (Bartoszewicz & Prucková, 2024). Support for Ukraine became a top priority for Petr Fiala’s cabinet, while opposition parties criticised both the general direction and particular measures, such as the Czech munitions initiative. Consequently, the 2025 electoral campaign witnessed the greatest increase in foreign-policy salience since Czechia joined the EU in 2004 (Hloušek & Kaniok, 2021, p. 716).

We identify elements of continuity and change in the salience of foreign and European politics for Czech parties, and the moments that politicised and polarised domestic discourse. Both the migration crisis and the war against Ukraine combine genuine foreign-policy dimensions with EU-related aspects. Therefore, we expect that in 2025 electoral manifestos and leaders’ statements these two policy domains will be entangled. In line with the ‘domestic turn’ towards greater salience of foreign policy, we next explore how this trend materialised in the 2025 parliamentary elections.

4. Operationalisation

Anticipating increasing narrative polarisation at both the party and campaign levels, as well as incumbents' use of foreign policy narratives to frame opposition actors as risks to geopolitical stability rather than as conventional policy alternatives, we operationalise our research accordingly. First, we operationalise the possible foreign policy and EU-related positions.

Drawing on existing research (Drulák, 2006; Hloušek & Kaniok, 2021; Kaniok & Hloušek, 2024), we identify four trajectories of the Czech Republic's preferred geopolitical orientation: Europeanism, which narrates the EU as the natural backbone of Czech foreign policy; Atlanticism, which stresses the primacy of the United States as the Czech Republic's strategic partner; Easternism, which suggests that, in a changing world in which the West is in decline, Czechia should turn towards either China or Russia; and unspecified Multilateralism, which narrates Czechia as a small state that should, above all, be institutionally anchored in various multilateral organisations. In addition, Czech foreign policy can be narrated as either proactive or reactive, and as internationalist or isolationist.

With regard to the EU, we employ a logical scale of party positions ranging from enthusiastic support for European integration to its complete rejection. We draw on the classical concepts of soft and hard Euroscepticism, as defined by Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008, 2024; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018). Hard Eurosceptic parties seek to dismantle the EU or to replace the current Union with a loose and purely intergovernmental form of cooperation. Soft Eurosceptic parties, by contrast, are critical of certain features of the current EU without seeking its abolition. Furthermore, we employ the concept of the Euro-optimistic party, defined as one that 'exhibits a dominantly positive party position on European integration and the European Union stemming from identification with the idea of European integration' (Hloušek et al., 2025, p. 5).

Party manifestos constitute the primary sources for reconstructing the themes, discourses, and narratives employed by Czech political parties when addressing foreign policy, international security, and European integration—policy areas which, for most Czech parties, continue to be framed primarily as domains of international relations (see Appendix 1). In addition, selected discourses of party leaders articulated during the election campaign (June–September 2025) and reported in the media are incorporated to broaden the scope of the analysed material and to complement institutional narratives with their more personalised counterparts.

The material selection includes articles from major nationwide media outlets (Denik.cz, Deník N, *Hospodářské noviny*, *Metro*, *Mladá fronta DNES*, *Právo*, and Seznam.cz). Where both print and online versions were available, both were taken into consideration. The search covered all items published during the June–September 2025 period. From this corpus, the most relevant contributions were

selected for further analysis. The corpus included all materials published by parties of a programmatic nature. Media outputs – interviews with politicians – were included, excluding repetitive contributions that were published twice or more in different media.

For the purpose of narrative reconstruction, either a party manifesto or a politician's media discourse constitutes a single analytical unit. Following the completion of the corpus, the texts were manually coded (see Appendix 2 for the codebook) across four dimensions: geopolitical trajectory, basic approach, Czech agency, and the Czech role within the EU. The coding process was iterative and interpretive. While the categories were informed by the existing literature, they were empirically refined during the analysis.

The approach adopted in this research has, of course, its limitations. First, the anticipation of increased polarisation stems from a profound knowledge of the Czech context at least as much as it is derived from the theoretical expectations discussed above (Section 2), namely that once foreign policy becomes a salient object of electoral competition (i.e. becomes more politicised), one can expect it to become more polarised.

A further limitation of this study relates to the composition of the corpus. Social media communication was intentionally omitted from the sample. Although it appears to be crucial for addressing voters in Czechia, the primary aim of the paper is to reconstruct party narratives, and longer texts—such as manifestos or leaders' interviews—offer a more detailed and nuanced account. Nevertheless, this selection limits the analysis's ability to capture the condensed communication of narratives to voters and prevents the establishment of any robust relationship between parties and voters as consumers of party narratives.

5. (Ex-)Incumbents' views

Parties that participated, at least for a certain period, in Petr Fiala's coalition government articulated largely similar narratives in their 2025 electoral manifestos.

The Pirates summarised their narrative in a concise yet energetic manner. Their account is securitised, albeit in a different way from that of the opposition parties during the 2021–2025 period. Czechia is presented as part of Europe in need of defence; however, defence is not understood as passive reaction. On the contrary, Czechia is expected to contribute actively to the development of joint EU and NATO cooperation, to reject the right of member states to exercise vetoes, and to anchor Czech foreign and European policies in the values of human rights and freedoms. In the Pirates' narrative, Czechia is ready 'to the best of our ability, to help those who are attacked and threatened and to promote a just peace' (Pirates, 2025, p. 9). The European trajectory constitutes a core feature of the Pirates'

narrative, symbolically reinforced by an explicit commitment to preparing for the adoption of the euro.

At the same time, foreign and European policy did not appear to constitute the Pirates' most salient electoral issue. Even in their media appearances, these topics tended to be overshadowed by debates concerning the party's withdrawal from Fiala's coalition government and by other domestic issues (Čapáková, 2025). Nevertheless, the narrative grounded in a Europeanist trajectory, an internationalist orientation, a proactive conception of Czech agency, and Euro-optimism remained largely uncontested.

As the leading force of the incumbent coalition, the Together coalition embedded foreign and security policy within a broader narrative portraying Czechia as a successful country that confronted the challenges of the 2021–2025 period with honour (Together, 2025). An active Czech foreign and European policy is presented as an integral component of this success story. Activity is framed as a key factor in fostering Czech resilience and mitigating external threats. While these threats are not trivialised, the overall outlook remains optimistic. In Together's narrative, Czechia is depicted as a reliable and proactive NATO ally, an active participant in the protection of the EU's external borders, and a driver of necessary EU reforms—without portraying the EU itself as a threat. This narrative effectively combines Czech pragmatic interests (e.g. 'We will adopt the euro when it is economically and politically advantageous for the Czech Republic') with international commitments (e.g. 'We will actively cooperate with our allies within and outside NATO to develop modern military capabilities, fulfil alliance goals, and strengthen NATO's European pillar').

Together's leader, Petr Fiala, placed strong emphasis on foreign policy issues, particularly Czech support for Ukraine in the context of Russian aggression and the country's broader pro-Western foreign policy orientation. Fiala's narrative cast the incumbent government as the principal defender against what he portrayed as a sinister coalition led by the chair of ANO Andrej Babiš and involving actors such as the SPD (Palata, 2025; Perknerová, 2025b). A similar emphasis characterised the foreign policy narratives of other leading Together politicians (Boubínová, 2025; Perknerová, 2025a). Collectively, these discourses confirm a balanced Atlanticist–Europeanist trajectory grounded in a proactive and internationalist orientation, with explicit EU-related positions articulated more cautiously. Nonetheless, moderate Euro-optimism prevailed over soft Eurosceptic tones.

STAN developed the most comprehensive foreign and European policy narrative among the Czech parties analysed in its 2025 manifesto. This Europeanist narrative presents Czechia as an active player that prioritises the European dimension of its foreign and security policy while simultaneously recognising the importance of close cooperation between the EU and NATO (STAN, 2025, p. 18). The Czech national narrative is closely intertwined with the EU narrative,

in the sense that all major policies with international implications are expected to be at least coordinated at the EU level. Czechia is portrayed as an active country firmly embedded within the EU and a broader multilateral framework, underpinned by a commitment to international law and to the legacy of the first Czech president Václav Havel's value-based diplomacy, which emphasises the international promotion of human rights and freedoms (STAN, 2025, p. 57). In STAN's narrative, the EU is not a threat but an opportunity to develop and anchor a strong and capable Czech foreign policy through the strengthening of the EU's foreign and—especially—security policy, including military and industrial capacities, in order to ensure the 'strengthening of European defence capabilities in response to the current geopolitical situation' (STAN, 2025, p. 58). Unlike the other narratives analysed, STAN emphasises the need to reform the EU not to weaken it, but to make it stronger, more active, and more operational (STAN, 2025, p. 60).

Although the context of Russian aggression featured prominently in STAN's campaign discourse (Titlbach, 2025a), the party's chair, Vít Rakušan, in contrast to the strategy adopted by Together's leaders, focused more strongly on EU-related issues, including clear and explicit support for the adoption of the common European currency (Kopecký & Hejl Hromková, 2025). Euro-optimism thus framed the party's overarching Europeanist trajectory, combined with a proactive conception of Czech foreign policy agency and an internationalist approach.

6. Voices from the oppositions

We now turn to parties that portrayed Petr Fiala's incumbent government as a negative hero (ANO, 2025, p. 30; AUTO, 2025, p. 9) or even as a villain (SPD, 2025, p. 3; Enough!, 2025), and whose core objective was to reverse its foreign and European policy course.

In ANO's manifesto, foreign and European policies play only a marginal role. ANO's narrative in these areas is an inward-looking account of a country that must above all defend its sovereignty and pursue its economic interests (ANO, 2025, p. 30). Czechia is presented as firmly anchored in both NATO and the EU; however, its foreign policy role is largely confined to reactive defence, against migration or against the Green Deal. Czechia is not framed as an active international actor, but rather as a state whose engagement is limited to supporting 'diplomatic steps leading to an end to the war in Ukraine and the elimination of the risks of war in Europe' (ANO, 2025, p. 30), building coalitions to defend its sovereignty, and expanding economic diplomacy. In the area of international security, ANO emphasises the indivisibility of internal and external security, yet this narrative is also heavily shaped by economic considerations related to the Czech armed forces. International security is thus portrayed as a straightforward

combination of well-paid soldiers and a strong domestic defence industry, as if economic factors were the decisive dimension (ANO, 2025, pp. 23–24).

The discourse of ANO's leading politicians largely confirmed this manifesto-based line. ANO leaders focused more on EU-related issues than on international relations more broadly. They articulated a soft Eurosceptic position, firmly rejecting calls for referendums on EU and NATO membership, while simultaneously criticising EU migration policy and the Green Deal and calling for profound reform of the Union (Machová, 2025; Titlbach, 2025b; Ťopek & Veinert, 2025). EU membership was framed in pragmatic, primarily economic terms.¹ As Andrej Babiš put it, 'the EU is business' (Vokál, 2025). Russia's war against Ukraine appeared less frequently in ANO's discourse; when it did, party leaders referred only vaguely to the need 'to act towards Russia in such a way that the pro-Western world is united' (Titlbach, 2025b). Babiš himself sought to downplay the importance of foreign policy issues altogether, emphasising a focus on Czech voters and domestic concerns (Nedvěd, 2025). Overall, ANO's rhetoric combined a subdued Atlanticism, a reactive conception of agency, and soft Euroscepticism. While Babiš personally leaned towards an isolationist approach, this tendency was partially offset by more internationalist tones articulated by other party leaders. Such ambiguity aptly reflects ANO's self-proclaimed 'catch-all' character.

For the party describing itself as 'the only real right-wing party in the Czech Republic' (AUTO, 2025, p. 6), neither foreign nor European policy occupied a flagship position in its manifesto. AUTO's narrative presents a geopolitically framed vision of a Western-oriented Czechia, firmly anchored in NATO and viewing European integration as useful, albeit in need of a 'Euro-realist' reorientation towards a community of 'self-confident and sovereign nation-states that collectively pursue only what they agree on, but otherwise do not interfere in each other's internal affairs' (AUTO, 2025, p. 9). The rejection of euro adoption, ideally entrenched constitutionally by anchoring the Czech crown in the Constitution, assumes an almost mythical symbolic role within the party's soft Eurosceptic profile (AUTO, 2025, p. 8). As a 'smaller' country, Czechia is expected to abandon value-based activism in favour of narrowly defined pragmatic economic interests, leading to a return to a 'corridor of normal relations' with China (AUTO, 2025, p. 10) and with illiberal Central European political actors.

In their pre-electoral discourse, AUTO leaders placed even stronger emphasis on criticism of the EU, occupying the discursive edge of soft Euroscepticism while not questioning Czechia's EU membership as such (Kolář, 2025b; *MF DNES*, 2025). The Atlanticism present in the manifesto largely disappeared from campaign rhetoric, as did internationalist elements. Both Petr Macinka, the chair of the party, and Filip Turek, its electoral leader, reduced their campaign narratives to a reactive form of soft Euroscepticism.

In contrast to these pragmatically framed narratives, the solipsist-regionalist narrative of the SPD offers a far more dramatic and securitised portrayal of

Czechia: a country ‘facing a confluence of crises, economic, social, energy, and security, which are the result of the irresponsible policies of the Petr Fiala government and, at the same time, increasing pressure from the European Union’ (SPD, 2025, p. 3). The world is depicted as a space filled with threats—from the Green Deal and Ukrainian or Muslim refugees to the EU Migration Pact—and the situation is framed as approaching an apocalyptic tipping point. Czechia must therefore ‘regain’ its sovereignty, allegedly appropriated by ‘unelected bureaucrats in Brussels’ (SPD, 2025, p. 4). Anything foreign is constructed as at least a potential threat, leading to a call for an exclusive focus on domestic priorities, including the termination of all support for Ukraine. Ukraine plays a central role in SPD’s narrative: the ‘Ukrainian regime’ (SPD, 2025, p. 13) functions as a negative hero symbolising war, financial waste, and neglect of Czech citizens’ needs. The SPD narrative is profoundly isolationist, advocating the revision of all Czech international obligations (SPD, 2025, p. 13) and the construction of a ‘fortress Czechia’ (SPD, 2025, p. 15). Cooperation is envisaged only with illiberal partners within the Visegrád Group. Such a cooperation is meant primarily to oppose the EU and NATO and it can be interpreted only as a tool of generally isolationist approach.

SPD’s electoral leaders adhered closely to this narrative. Calls for referendums on EU and NATO membership played a central role (Kamenský, 2025; Vachtl & Pospíšilová, 2025; Veselý, 2025). Party chair Tomio Okamura in particular portrayed Ukrainian refugees in Czechia as a threat and a social problem, presenting stricter return policies as remedies for issues such as healthcare accessibility or housing shortages (Vachtl & Pospíšilová, 2025). Prominent SPD MP and vice-chair Radim Fiala further developed the narrative of illiberal regional cooperation, stating:

I can imagine that we would reach an agreement with Hungary, Slovakia and, after the next elections, also with Poland, if the Law and Justice party wins there, and they proceed together as the Visegrád Four. In my opinion, we must renew V4 cooperation. And I can imagine the creation of a V6, V8 or V10, with Austria, Slovenia, Croatia and other states that would join. SPOLU and Petr Fiala say that we belong to the West, but I am convinced that we do not. History has shown this several times. But not to the East either. I believe that we are able to create a strong bloc of sovereign states here that will cooperate and ensure free movement of goods, capital, and people. (Kamenský, 2025)

In sum, SPD’s narrative combines a solipsist-regionalist geopolitical trajectory with an isolationist approach, a reactive conception of agency, and hard Euroscepticism.

Finally, the Enough! coalition (2025), although failing to cross the five per cent electoral threshold, articulated a simple narrative of Czech foreign and

European policy. It presents Czechia as economically dependent and endangered by the war in Ukraine, which must therefore be ‘immediately terminated’. As a result, Czech foreign and European policies are required to undergo a complete reversal. The narrative calls for multilateral cooperation instead of NATO and EU membership, a pragmatic turn towards regional cooperation with Austria and the Visegrád countries, and broader global engagement with Eurasian states in place of value-based foreign policy. As the manifesto states: ‘We will develop global trade and diplomatic relations with all countries in the world, including those with different political and constitutional traditions. We will free Czech diplomacy from any lecturing or mentoring by other countries’ (Enough!, 2025). The coalition’s leader, Kateřina Konečná (chair of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, which constituted the backbone of the coalition), consistently reinforced this narrative, emphasising peace as the paramount value, the need to restore intensive contacts with Central European countries, and—ideally—the organisation of referendums on EU and NATO membership (Karbulka, 2025; Kolář, 2025a; Štalmach, 2025). Compared to Okamura or Babiš, Konečná did not restrict her discourse to European integration alone, but engaged with a broader foreign policy context. Overall, the Enough! narrative can be characterised as combining multilateralist internationalism with reactive agency and hard Euroscepticism.

Table 1:
Foreign and European policy narratives in party manifestos

Party / Coalition	Trajectory	Approach	Agency	Role
Enough!	multilateralist	Internationalist	reactive	hard Eurosceptic
SPD	solipsist – regionalist	Isolationist	reactive	hard Eurosceptic
AUTO	Atlanticist	Internationalist	reactive	soft Eurosceptic
ANO	Atlanticist	Internationalist	reactive	soft Eurosceptic
Pirates	Europeanist	Internationalist	pro-active	Eurooptimist
STAN	Europeanist	Internationalist	pro-active	Eurooptimist
Together	Atlanticist-Europeanist	Internationalist	pro-active	Eurooptimist

Source: Author.

Table 1 summarises the foreign and European policy narratives articulated in the 2025 electoral manifestos. One of the most striking findings is that, despite the heated campaign debates, no Czech political party openly endorses an Eastern trajectory of foreign policy orientation.² Neither Russia nor China is presented as the trajectory that Czechia should follow. Only AUTO and Enough! refer to China in pragmatic terms, primarily as an important trading partner, and nothing more. There is, however, one party that does not fit neatly into any of the remaining trajectories. The SPD developed a specific trajectory that combines

a solipsistic vision of an isolated Czechia, passively reacting to and withdrawing from international engagement, with limited cooperation confined to the Central European neighbourhood. The SPD is the only party analysed that explicitly favours isolationism as its basic approach. Moreover, a clear cleavage emerges between reactive parties competing in the 2025 elections from the opposition (ANO, AUTO, SPD, and Enough!) and parties that share a proactive vision of Czech international agency and that had, at least for some time, been part of the incumbent government. Incumbency, bringing direct experience and interaction with EU institutions, also appears to have reinforced Euro-optimist preferences regarding the Czech role within the EU.

7. Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis of party manifestos and campaign narratives confirms the broader assumption that foreign and European policy issues have become increasingly politicised and have turned into salient components of electoral competition (Raunio & Wagner, 2020, 2024; Hofmann & Martill, 2021; Varga & Buzogány, 2021). In 2025, Czech political parties devoted considerable attention to crafting and disseminating distinct foreign and European policy narratives, in line with expert expectations concerning the growing salience of these issues in Czech political debate (Holzer et al., 2020; Havlík & Kluknavská, 2022; Hesová, 2025; Kaniok, 2025; Zákřavský et al., 2025).

This brings us to the first research question: which dominant foreign and European policy narratives did Czech political parties employ during the 2025 electoral campaign? Our findings show that all parties included in the analysis articulated recognisable foreign policy narratives. Within the camp of the incumbent coalition, an internationalist approach and a proactive conception of Czech foreign and European policy agency remained the prevailing norm, complemented by varying shades of Euro-optimist interpretations of Czechia's role in the EU. Even the Together coalition relegated the Eurosceptic elements traditionally associated with ODS discourse to the margins. The principal difference between Together and the other governing parties (including the Pirates) lay in a stronger emphasis on the Atlanticist trajectory, which was presented not as an alternative to Europeanism but as its complement.

Opposition parties, by contrast, offered a more diverse set of narratives. The narratives of ANO and AUTO were broadly similar, combining an internationalist orientation with an Atlanticist trajectory, yet, unlike those of the incumbents, placing greater emphasis on the reactive nature of Czech agency and on soft Euroscepticism. Enough! continued in a long-standing communist tradition of a reactive, hard Eurosceptic narrative, combined with internationalist and multilateralist elements. The SPD articulated the most distinctive narrative,

grounded in a reactionary conception of agency, isolationism, hard Euroscepticism, and, in particular, a geopolitical trajectory that combines solipsistic withdrawal with selective cooperation among ideologically aligned illiberal regimes in Central Europe. Central Europe demonstrates some prominence only in the opposition narratives, thereby confirming only partially expectations regarding the rising salience of Central European issues in general and Visegrád cooperation in particular (Janebová & Hloušek, 2023). Reciprocally, the incumbent parties did not present Central European cooperation because of regional politicians that were 'toxic' to them (such as Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán and Slovak PM Robert Fico).

The second research question concerned the extent to which the 2025 narratives aligned with established ideational strands. Here, most parties largely adhered to their traditional patterns. The main innovations were the novel trajectory developed by the SPD and the shift of the Together coalition from soft Euroscepticism towards a more restrained, or lukewarm, Euro-optimist narrative. Liberal internationalism remained a defining feature of the incumbent governing parties, while a fully sovereigntist position characterised only the far-right SPD, provided that hard Euroscepticism is not automatically equated with sovereigntism *per se*.

Our third research question examined the alignment between EU-related and foreign policy narratives. A clear pattern emerges. Europeanist and internationalist narratives are typically associated with a strong emphasis on intensive and active cooperation within the EU and with Euro-optimist conceptions of the Czech role in the Union. Conversely, soft and hard Euroscepticism tend to align with isolationist and reactive preferences in foreign policy, at least among parties represented in parliament. At the same time, even Euro-optimist narratives of the Czech role in the EU relied predominantly on instrumental justifications for active and cooperative engagement, thereby confirming the long-standing dominance of instrumental arguments in Czech debates on 'Europe' (Braun, 2005; Beneš & Harnisch, 2015; Hloušek & Kaniok, 2020; Cabada, 2024b).

In simplified terms, the incumbency-opposition cleavage structured two distinct narrative worlds. In the discourse of parties with experience in Fiala's coalition government, Czech foreign and European policy is framed around Russia as the primary external threat and foreign-policy 'other', while the EU and NATO are treated as natural frameworks of belonging. Not as shelters behind which to hide, but as arenas in which Czechia should actively shape its own future and that of Europe. By contrast, the conceptual map of the 2025 'battle' of foreign and European policy narratives remains relatively straightforward, delineating a clear divide between Europeanist and Euro-optimist former governing parties on one side, and Eurosceptic, reactive opposition parties on the other. Within the latter group, however, a further distinction emerges between internationalist actors (ANO and AUTO) and those advancing an isolationist approach (Enough! and SPD).

The pronounced divergence between the narratives of incumbents and the opposition constitutes a noteworthy finding. It suggests that the politicisation of foreign policy narratives is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather reflects the broader pattern of party system polarisation along the government–opposition divide. The Euroscepticism of ANO and the Euro-optimism of the Together coalition, for instance, appear to be rooted more in this structural polarity than in other factors shaping the positions of ANO and the Together parties vis-à-vis European integration.

Another significant finding concerns the cautious manner in which pro-Russian or pro-Chinese sentiments are articulated. Neither SPD nor Enough!, despite including numerous politicians with clearly pro-Russian leanings, adopted an unequivocally pro-Eastern stance; instead, they tended to mask such sympathies behind narratives of isolationism or multilateralism. A systematic comparison of these narrative strategies with those employed by ideologically similar parties in Central and Western Europe would be valuable in elucidating the sources of this relative reticence.

Although the present paper does not aim to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for the use of foreign policy narratives by political parties, the analysis of the Czech case nonetheless opens at least one promising avenue for further theoretical inquiry. The findings provide additional support for the study of politicisation and the erosion of broad domestic consensus on foreign policy priorities. Not only European Union-related issues, but also wider global and regional developments, appear capable of triggering contestation between competing party narratives. Expanding the scope of the politicisation debate to encompass a broader range of foreign policy questions would therefore be highly desirable.

A more fine-grained analysis of how political parties have framed the war in Ukraine may help to clarify one of the underlying mechanisms. Actors such as SPD or ANO did not treat Ukraine solely as a foreign policy issue. While their narratives formally called for an end to the war, they selectively emphasised those aspects of the conflict that intersect with domestic political concerns—for example, mobilising fear associated with refugees from Ukraine residing in Czechia. Broader comparative research could, in turn, generate more generalisable propositions regarding this particular dimension of the politicisation of foreign policy within domestic political debates.

References:

- Bartoszewicz, M. G., & Prucková, M. (2024). "Enemy Image? A Comparative Analysis of the Russian Federation's Role and Position in the Leading National Security Documents of Estonia and the Czech Republic." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 32(1), 215–27. doi:10.1080/14782804.2023.2224237
- Baun, M. J., & Marek, D. (2010). Czech Foreign Policy and EU Integration: European and Domestic Sources. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 11(1): 2–21. doi:10.1080/15705850903553513
- Beneš, V., & Harnisch, S. (2015). Role theory in symbolic interactionism: Czech Republic, Germany and the EU. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50(1), 164–165. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836714525768>
- Boubínová, M. (2025, August 27). Ve volební kampani nám chybí tvář – pan nebo paní TOP 09 (interview with Jiří Pospíšil, Together – TOP 09), *Deník N*.
- Braun, M. (2005). The Troublesome Concept of Sovereignty – the Czech debate on European Unity. *Perspectives*, 25(Winter 2005/2006), 7–22.
- Brusenbauch Meislová, M., & Szent-Iványi, B. (2023). Exploitation Opportunities for Distant Crises: Political Framings of Brexit in the Czech Republic and Hungary. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 70(1), 55–65. doi:10.1080/10758216.2021.1915162
- Cabada, L. (2024a). Illiberal Populism as a Polarizing Factor of Regional Cooperation in Central Europe. *Revista UNISCI / UNISCI Journal*, 66, 63–79.
- Cabada, L. (2024b). Twenty years of Czech EU membership : between the pragmatic bandwagoning and the 'Visegrad-effect'. *20 Years of EU Membership Paper Series*, 3–14. <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/122011>
- Cadier, D. (2019). The foreign policy of the Czech Republic: Domestic politics back with a vengeance. In F. Bindi (Ed.), *Europe and America: The end of the transatlantic relationship?* (pp. 199–215). Brookings Institution Press.
- Calca, P. & Gross, M. (2019). To Adapt or to Disregard? Parties' Reactions to External Shocks. *West European Politics*. 42(3), 545–572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2018.1549851>
- Capáková, V. (2025, September 30). Chceme zabránit tomu, aby byl premiérem estébák, říká předvolební pirátský tandem (interview with Zdeněk Hřib and Ivan Bartoš, Pirates), *Hospodářské noviny*.
- Charvátová, D., & Filipec, O. (2022). The Populist Construct of Migration: Framing within SPD's Communication Strategy ahead of the 2019 European Elections. *Politické vedy*, 25(4), 43–68. <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2022.25.4.43-68>
- De Wilde, P., & Trenz, H.-J. (2012). Denouncing European Integration: Euroscepticism as Polity Contestation. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15(4), 537–554. doi:10.1177/1368431011432968
- Drulák, P. (2006). Qui Décide la Politique étrangère Tchèque? Les Internationalistes, les Européanistes, les Atlantistes ou les Autonomistes? *Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, 61(1), 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ris.061.0071>
- Eihmanis, E. (2024). EU Transnational Coalitions in Polycrisis: The Visegrád-4 before and after the Russo-Ukrainian War. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31(10), 3299–3323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2357268>
- Filipec, O., & Měšťánková, P. (2024). "We Are Not Pro-Russian, But..." Comparing Communication of Czech ANO Movement and Slovak SMER-SD Regarding the Russian Aggression Against Ukraine. *Revista UNISCI / UNISCI Journal*, 66, 81–107.
- Hagström, L., & Gustafsson, K. (2019). Narrative Power: How Storytelling Shapes East Asian International Politics. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32(4), 387–406. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623498>
- Havlík, V. 2009. *České politické strany a evropská integrace*. Evropeizace, evropanství, euroskepticismus?, Brno: MUNI.
- Havlík, V., Hloušek, V., & Kaniok, P. (2017). *Europeanised Defiance - Czech Euroscepticism since 2004*, Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers,
- Havlík, V., & Kluknavská, A. (2022). The populist vs anti-populist divide in the time of pandemic: The 2021 Czech national election and its consequences for European politics. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 60(S1), 76–87. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13413>

- Havlík, V., & Hloušek, V. (2025). Where Have All the 'Exiters' Gone? Contextualising the Concept of Hard Euroscepticism. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 63(2), 351–368. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13602>
- Hesová, Zora. (2025). International Principles or Crude Geopolitics? The Incoherence of Czech Foreign Policy Towards Ukraine and Gaza. *Czech Journal of International Relations*, 60(2), 147–163. <https://doi.org/10.32422/cjir.1893>
- Hloušek, V., & Kaniok, P. (2020). Czech Republic. In V. Hloušek & P. Kaniok (Eds.), *The European Parliament election of 2019 in East-Central Europe: Second-order Euroscepticism* (pp. 61–82). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hloušek, V., & Kaniok, P. (2021). Europe Forever? Czech Political Parties on the Orientation of Czech Foreign Policy. *East European Politics*, 37(4), 702–21. doi:10.1080/21599165.2020.1855424
- Hloušek, V., Kutnarová, P., & Velička Zapletalová, V. (2025). Eurooptimism: seeking to define a term whose meaning has become far from obvious. *European Politics and Society*, DOI:10.1080/23745118.2025.2576696
- Hoegliger, D. (2016). The Politicisation of European Integration in Domestic Election Campaigns. *West European Politics*, 39(1), 44–63. doi:10.1080/01402382.2015.1081509
- Hofmann, S. C., & Martill, B. (2021). The party scene: new directions for political party research in foreign policy analysis. *International Affairs*, 97(2), 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaal165>
- Holzer, J., Jirušek, M., & Kuchyňková, P. (2020). Russia as viewed by the main Czech political actors. In J. Holzer & M. Mareš (Eds.), *Czech security dilemma: Russia as a friend or enemy?* (pp. 55–89). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20546-1_3
- Hutter, S., Grande, E., & Kriesi, H. (2016). *Politicising Europe*, Cambridge: CUP.
- Janebová, P. & Hloušek, V. (2023). Community of Fate? Visegrád Cooperation Viewed from Bratislava and Prague. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 75(6), 947–971. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2023.2193359>
- Kaarbo, J. (2015). A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory. *International Studies Review*, 17(2), 189–216. <https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12213>
- Kamenský, S. (2025, September 24). Na Západ nepatříme. Ale ani na Východ (interview with Radim Fiala, SPD), *Mladá fronta Dnes*.
- Kaniok, P. (2025). The Neutral Servant: The Czech EU Council Presidency and Its Framing by the Political Parties. *Journal of European Integration*, 47(5), 675–701. doi:10.1080/07036337.2024.2407573
- Kaniok, P., & Hloušek, V. (2024). Czech Political Parties and the War in Ukraine: Continuity of Foreign Policy Stances. *East European Politics*, 40(3), 395–411. doi:10.1080/21599165.2023.2295888
- Karbulka, L. (2025, September 26). Mou nejsilnější stránkou je otevřenost a pravdomluvnost (interview with Kateřina Konečná, Stačilo), *Metro*.
- Karlas, J. (2004). Czechoslovakia/The Czech Republic and European Integration: During and after the Cold War. *East European Quarterly*, 10(2), 25–42.
- Kolář, P. (2025a, September 22). Konečná: Ústavní soud nemá rozhodovat volby. *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Kolář, P. (2025b, September 18). Obecné referendum je blbost! (interview with Petr Macinka, AUTO). *Mladá fronta Dnes*.
- Kopecký, J., & Hejl Hromková, D. (2025, September 29). Ve vládě nám chyběla odvaha (interview with Vít Rakušan, STAN), *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Kořan, M. (2012). Dvě dekády české zahraniční politiky a bezvýchodnost internacionalistické hegemonie. *Politologický časopis*, 19(3), 195–217.
- Kovář, J., & Sychra, Z. (2018). The European dimension of the Czech foreign policy: The ambivalent position of the reluctant European. In A. Kizeková (Ed.), *Czech foreign policy in 2017: Analysis* (pp. 41–70). Institute of International Relations.
- Kříž, Z., Chovančík, M., & Krpec, O. (2021). Czech foreign policy after the Velvet Revolution. In J. K. Joly & T. Haesebrouck (Eds.), *Foreign policy change in Europe since 1991* (pp. 49–72). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68218-7_3
- Machová, M. (2025, September 6). Jsem jediná, kdo může porazit Fialu. A porazím ho (interview with Alena Schillerová, ANO), *Právo*.
- Marek, D., & Baun, M. J. (2012). The Czech Republic: The domestic limits to foreign-policy effectiveness. In B. J. C. McKercher (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of diplomacy and statecraft* (pp. 143–154). Routledge.

- Marzi, P. (2025). Euroscepticism: A Meta-Analysis. *Acta Politica*, 60(4), 704–722. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-024-00351-9>
- MF Dnes. (2025, September 19). „Do vlády chceme s tím, kdo se postaví Bruselu“ (interview with Filip Turek, AUTO), *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2018). Narrativa estratégica : el arte de la diplomacia en el siglo XXI. *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, 113, 3–95 <https://re.sre.gob.mx/rmpe/index.php/rmpe/article/view/235/215>
- Nedvěd, J. (2025, September 26) Andrej Babiš: S Putinem jsem nikdy nejednal. *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Neuman, M., & Neuman Stanivuković, S. (2025). A Reluctant European? The Czech Republic's EU Membership Experience Read through the EU Council Presidency. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 33(2), 434–48. doi:10.1080/14782804.2024.2348684.
- Noort, C. van, & Colley, T. (2021). How Do Strategic Narratives Shape Policy Adoption? Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative. *Review of International Studies*, 4(1), 39–63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210520000388>
- Palata, L. (2025, July 22). Fiala u Merze v Berlíně: S Německem se shodujeme, se Slovenskem rozcházíme, *Deník.cz*.
- Patterson, M. & Monroe, K. R. (1998). Narrative in Political Science, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1, 315–351. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.315>
- Perknerová, K. (2025a, August 22). Jan Lipavský: Andreji Babišovi by se mohlo stát, že dopadne jako Paroubek, *Deník.cz*.
- Perknerová, K. (2025b, September 26). Premiér Petr Fiala: Babišovi jde jen o osobní a mocenské zájmy, *Deník.cz*.
- Raunio, T., & Wagner, W. (2024). Legislatures, political parties, and foreign policy. In J. Kaarbo & C. G. Thies (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of foreign policy analysis* (pp. 302–322). Oxford University Press.
- Raunio, T., & Wagner, W. (2020). The Party Politics of Foreign and Security Policy. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 16(4), 515–531. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/oraa018>
- Roe, E. (1994). *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Roselle, L., Miskimmon, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2014). Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power. *Media, War & Conflict*, 7(1), 70–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>
- Schmidt, V. A. (2008). Discursive institutionalism: The explanatory power of ideas and discourse. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 303–326. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060606.135342>
- Skulínek, M. (2021). *Do pekla, nebo do ráje? Evropská integrace v diskurzu českých a slovenských politických stran (1989–1998)*, Brno: CDK and MUNI.
- Smekal, H., & Havlík, V. (2023). Drivers of Domestic Politicisation of European Issues: Explaining Low Politicisation of Differentiated Integration in Czechia. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 31(3), 979–94. doi:10.1080/14782804.2022.2106952
- Štalmach, D. (2025, September 23). Změny v kraji jsou moc pomalé (interview with Kateřina Konečná, Stačilo), *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Strapáčová, M., & Hloušek, V. (2018). Anti-Islamism without Moslems: Cognitive frames of Czech antimigrant politics. *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics*, 12(1), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jnmlp-2018-0001>
- Sychra, Z., Kratochvíl, P. (2021). Czechia: Who Is the Most Eurosceptic of Them All? The Eurosceptic Race to the Bottom. In Kaeding, M., Pollak, J., Schmidt, P. (Eds.), *Euroscepticism and the Future of Europe* (pp. 29–33). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Szczerbiak, A., & Taggart, P. (2024). Euroscepticism and Anti-establishment Parties in Europe. *Journal of European Integration*, 46(8), 1171–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2024.2329634>
- Szczerbiak, A., & Taggart, P. (2008). Theorizing party-based Euroscepticism: Problems of definition, measurement, and causality. In A. Szczerbiak & P. Taggart (Eds.), *Opposing Europe? The comparative party politics of Euroscepticism: Vol. 2. Comparative and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 238–262). Oxford University Press.
- Tabosa, C. (2020). Constructing Foreign Policy vis-a`-vis the Migration Crisis: the Czech and Slovak Cases. *Czech Journal of International Relations*, 55(2), 5–23.

- Taggart, P., & Szczerbiak, A. (2018). Putting Brexit into Perspective: The Effect of the Eurozone and Migration Crises and Brexit on Euroscepticism in European States. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(8), 1194–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1467955>
- Titlbach, F. (2025a, August 1). Chci větší klub, než má ODS, říká za Starosty (interview with Vít Rakušan, STAN), *Deník N*.
- Titlbach, F. (2025b, August 4). Havlíček: Příkopky mezi námi a ODS jsou teď příliš hluboké (interview with Karel Havlíček, ANO), *Deník N*.
- Toettoe, B., Guntz, F., & Turcsanyi, R. (2024). Identarian Atlanticism and Foreign Policy Implications: A Study of European Public Attitudes. *European Politics and Society*, 26(4), 836–57. doi:10.1080/23745118.2024.2421889
- Ťopek, M., & Vainert, L. (2025, August 15). Referendum o vystoupení z EU? Červená linie, o které se nebudeme ani bavit (interview with Karel Havlíček, ANO). *Hospodářské noviny*.
- Vachtl, J., & Pospíšilová, E. (2025, September 30). Odchod Ukrajinců vyřeší drahé bydlení. *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Varga, M., & Buzogány, A. (2021). The Foreign Policy of Populists in Power: Contesting Liberalism in Poland and Hungary. *Geopolitics*, 26(5), 1442–63. doi:10.1080/14650045.2020.1734564
- Veselý, J., & Dvořáková, L. (2025, September 24). Naše vládní angažmá vyvede zem z marasmu (interview with Jaroslav Foldyna, SPD), *Mladá fronta DNES*.
- Weiss, T. (2021). De-Europeanisation of Czech policy towards Eastern Partnership countries under populist leaders. *Journal of European Integration*, 43(5), 587–602, DOI: 10.1080/07036337.2021.1927008
- Vokál, V. (2025, September 9). Z EU vystupovat nechceme, Evropa je byznys, říká Babiš. Trump ho zklamal. *Idnes.cz*.
- Zákravský, J., Ponížilová, M., & Hlaváčková, H. N. (2025). Changes in Czech Foreign Policy Positions: European Migration Crisis and Russian Attack against Ukraine. *East European Politics*, 41(2): 220–38. doi:10.1080/21599165.2024.2439858

Appendix 1: List of the party 2025 electoral manifestos

<i>Party or coalition (citation)</i>	<i>Czech title</i>	<i>English title</i>	<i>Website</i>
ANO (ANO, 2025)	Program pro váš lepší život	Program for your better life	https://www.anobudelip.cz/file/edee/ke-stazeni/volebni-program-2025.pdf
Motoristé sobě (AUTO, 2025)	Umíme vyřešit i složité věci	We can solve even the complicated issues	https://36beec02.delivery.rocketcdn.me/wp-content/uploads/Volebni_program-2025_MOTORISTE-SOBE.pdf
Piráti (Pirates, 2025)	Nakopneme to! Plán pirátů, jak posunout Česko dopředu	We will start it up! Pirate's plan how to move Czechia forwards	https://majak.pirati.cz/documents/506/PROGRAM_PIRATU_2025.pdf
SPD (SPD, 2025)	Česko, jaké chcete. Jo, pojďme na to!	Czechia, whatever you want. Yeah, let's do it!	https://spd.cz/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Program-SPD-pro-volby-do-Poslanecke-snemovny-2025.pdf
Spolu (Together, 2025)	Vize 2030 – Česko, úspěšná bezpečná země, ve které chceme žít!	Vision 2030 – Czechia, a successful, safe country in which we want to live!	https://spolu25.cz/pdf/SPOLU-program-2025.pdf
Stačilo! (Enough!, 2025)	Program hnutí Stačilo! pro volby v roce 2025	The Enough! movement's program for the 2025 elections	https://www.stacilo.cz/#program
STAN (STAN, 2025)	Pro dobrý život v naší zemi	For a good life in our country	https://www.starostove.cz/files/dobry-program-starostove.pdf

All manifestos are in the author's archive, the websites were accessed on 29 December 2025.

Appendix 2:

Codebook

Category and codes	Key indicators	Example
GEOPOLITICAL TRAJECTORY		
The key partners for orientation of the Czech foreign and European policies		
Europeanist	● Czech foreign policy fully integrated with EU ● EU as security provider	Ukraine is fighting for us too, and that is why we will support it through a strong and united Europe. (Pirates, 2025, p. 9)
Atlanticist	● Czech foreign policy actively building NATO ● USA and NATO as a security provider	Our place is in NATO, which must remain the key defence alliance of the entire Western world. (AUTO, 2025, p. 9)
Eastern	● China and Russia as economic opportunity ● Western power in decline	Expanding NATO has not strengthened European security, the US is reassessing its relationship with NATO, and an opportunity is opening up to create a new European collective security structure that includes Russia. (Enough!, 2025)
Multilateralist	● Czech foreign policy depends on international law and institutional cooperation ● Czech foreign policy shall build and foster international norms and institutions	We will develop global trade and diplomatic relations with all countries in the world, including those with different political and constitutional traditions. We will free Czech diplomacy from any lecturing or mentoring by other countries. (Enough!, 2025)
BASIC APPROACH		
The basic perception of the role Czechia has to play in foreign policy		
Isolationism	● Czechia shall remain passive and focus on domestic issues ● Czechia is a small state	The WHO has become a lobbying tool for multinational pharmaceutical companies and groups that advocate for the restriction of national sovereignty and fundamental human rights and freedoms. Therefore, our membership in this organization must be terminated as soon as possible. (SPD, 2025, p. 13)
Internationalism	● Czechia shall be an active international player ● Czechia plays its international role, typically within EU and NATO framework	We are actively involved in NATO, we participate in international missions – we know that the world does not end at our borders. (Together, 2025)

CZECH AGENCY The source of Czech foreign policy agency, stemming from (and related to) the perception of the role of Czech foreign policy in Europe and in the World		
Pro-active	● Basic value orientation is stable ● Czechia contributes to construction of European and global order ● Stress on active participation in international politics	For the safety of Czechs and the prosperity of the country, we will actively speak out in the world and deepen cooperation with traditional allies. We will not give in to aggressors. We will stand up for those persecuted by undemocratic regimes and for all who are persecuted for their faith or ethnic origin. (Together, 2025)
Reactive	● Global order is not stable ● Czechia depends on changing global and European geopolitics ● Stress on defence of national sovereignty	We will not escape our geographical affiliation with Europe either. Therefore, we need to carefully monitor trends and shifts within the EU, accommodate those that suit us, and seek partners at the level of political forces and states. (AUTO, 2025, p. 10)
CZECH ROLE IN THE EU Czech position towards the EU, role of the EU in Czech foreign policy, Czech role in the EU		
Eurooptimist	● EU as value community ● EU as geopolitical actor	The common approach of the European Union, which acts with a single voice based on a previous agreement, with the views of all members being taken into account, even if they do not always agree. EU membership is absolutely essential for the Czech Republic - it allows us to export more than we import and ensures a stronger position in the world. (STAN, 2025, p. 57)
Soft Eurosceptic	● EU as economic community ● EU as technocratic necessity	It is in the interest of the Czech Republic not to transfer further powers to the EU level (veto right), not to admit our energy dependence (support for nuclear power, opposition to the Green Deal), not to participate in any activities that lead to further indebtedness and further regulations of the European economy, to protect external and, if necessary, internal borders against mass migration and to maintain a free information space. (AUTO, 2025, p. 10)
Hard Eurosceptic	● EU as constraint on sovereignty ● EU as external imposition	It will oppose the centralizing tendencies of the EU institutions and their ideological extremism, which harm its security, economic and social interests. If this is not possible, it is appropriate to prepare a collective withdrawal from the EU in cooperation with similarly oriented states. With this aim, we will declare a referendum on our remaining or leaving the EU. (Enough!, 2025)

Endnotes:

- 1 It is important to note that Babiš uses the concept of a 'pragmatic' foreign policy primarily as a rhetorical device to distinguish his approach from the allegedly unproductive, value-oriented foreign policy of the Fiala government.
- 2 It, of course, does not mean that there are no pro-Russian politicians. Coalition Enough! and SPD include openly pro-Russian politicians but the party leaders and official documents are hiding the Eastern sympathies behind the language of multilateral foreign policy and cooperation with all possible partners. On the other hand, the most pro-Russian remain the small allies of SPD – Tricolour and PRO parties.