



Priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022

Europe as a task: rethink, rebuild, repower

When in 1996 Czech President Václav Havel considered the future of our continent in his speech at the Charlemagne Prize ceremonial, entitled *Europe as a Task*, he stressed that the tasks ahead of Europe deserve careful and thorough reflection. In the then international context, particularly favourable to Western democracies, Havel called on Europeans to rediscover their conscience and to take responsibility for global environmental, social and economic challenges. He did not want Europe to reclaim the position of a “global Head of orchestra” and to impose its cultural values on the rest of the world. What he had in mind was rather inspiring and leading by example.

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which has completely overhauled the geopolitical situation on our continent this year, has demonstrated at the same time that Europeans in a crisis triggered by an external threat are able to act very quickly, effectively and in a united way. Yet European unity is not one of an authoritarian unanimity, but a unity in diversity of a multi-voice debate, which, however, is driven, by our common values, towards consensus. Our culture of political dialogue and consensus-building that we have been forging for decades proves to be a strength rather than a weakness of the European project.

Nevertheless, the brutal war aggression beyond the Eastern borders of our community has also clearly shown us that we will have to find the courage to reevaluate many of our current approaches and premises. We therefore perceive the Havel-like slogan “Europe as a Task”, chosen by the Czech Republic as the motto of its Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2022 not only as an opportunity to reflect together, but above all as a call for accountability and determined action based on the values that our conscience requires us to pursue. If we want to live up to the expectations of this historical moment, our tripple challenge is to: rethink, rebuild and repower Europe.

We believe that a common reflection on European tasks must, in the current situation, first and foremost find the right recipe as quickly as possible for a policy mix that will ensure security and peace on our continent, lead the EU towards reaching the long-term goals of the green and digital transitions, while at the same time making it possible to deal effectively with the present security, energy and humanitarian crisis, as well as with acute economic and social challenges that are partly due to the COVID pandemic and which are exacerbated by Russia’s aggression.

The overall objective of the Czech Presidency is to contribute as much as possible to creating the conditions for the security and prosperity of the EU in the context of the European values



of freedom, social justice, democracy and the rule of law and environmental responsibility. The EU must focus on ensuring security together with NATO and affirming the strategic resilience and competitiveness of the European economy. The EU, together with the United States and other democratic states outside the EU, should become a strong foundation for a strategic community defending fundamental values, human rights, a free way of life and liberal democracy. In order to achieve this objective, the Czech Republic has determined the following priority areas for its Presidency of the Council of the EU.

1. Managing the refugee crisis and Ukraine's post-war recovery

Following Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the Czech Presidency will support the EU's efforts to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity by using all instruments and programmes offered by the EU, including the strengthening of sanctions. The EU's and its Member States' political and military support for Ukraine is in our vital interest in order to ensure security in Europe. The Czech Presidency will work in favour of reaching a consensus on the granting of candidate status to Ukraine.

Russian aggression has caused the most massive refugee crisis since World War II. The EU must take all steps to help best deal with the unprecedented refugee wave, in particular of women and children from war-affected Ukraine. This will require the mobilisation of all available resources and expertise as well as their coordinated use.

The Czech Presidency will build on the principles of solidarity, efficiency and flexibility in this area. In cooperation with the European Commission, it will work on flexible transfers of funds and the creation of the necessary structures to assist the most affected Member States, organisations and the civil sector. Protecting children and ensuring their access to education will be a priority. For women's participation in the labour market, sufficient pre-school and extracurricular capacity will need to be guaranteed. Coordination in ensuring healthcare will also be an important priority. The Czech Presidency will pay attention to effective European cooperation and solidarity so that the long-term integration of refugees into the societies of the Member States is successful.

Another important task of the Czech Presidency will be the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, focusing on restoring critical infrastructure, ensuring basic services, strengthening resilience and economic recovery and stability in Ukraine. Strong EU cooperation with Ukraine and securing the necessary financial resources across the free world will be crucial.

2. Energy security

The EU cannot be vitally dependent on countries that directly threaten its security and must therefore break its dependence on Russian gas, oil and coal. The Czech Presidency will put emphasis on the EU's energy security issues, which are currently more pressing than the energy transition, and on the accelerated implementation of REPowerEU, an important part of



which is diversification of sources including logistics, energy savings and acceleration of the transition to low-emission and renewable energy sources. The Czech Presidency is ready to work on the implementation of the regulation of gas reserves, i.e. filling storages in the run-up to winter, and the promotion of voluntary joint purchases, so that the EU uses its weight in a way similar to the purchase of vaccines.

The decarbonisation of the EU industry and the transition from natural gas to hydrogen represents an important goal requiring the implementation of an ambitious plan for the development of hydrogen infrastructure, storage and terminals. Fit for 55 creates the basis for decarbonisation. However, the Czech Presidency will focus especially on thorough implementation of the main short-term objective, i.e. remove dependence on Russian fossil fuels. The Czech Presidency will also deal with energy efficiency (EED) and the use of renewable energy. At the same time, the development of energy infrastructure is crucial, as it will strengthen the energy resilience of the EU as a whole. Finally, the Czech Presidency will deal with the role of nuclear energy in ensuring the EU's energy security and meeting the EU's climate goals.

In the field of transport, the Presidency will concentrate on reducing emissions, promoting environmentally friendly modes of transport and infrastructure for alternative fuels, as a key prerequisite for the development of clean mobility. At the same time, it will focus on the development of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) in order to facilitate transport flows across Member States, while supporting the decarbonisation of transport.

At the same time, the Czech Presidency will work on implementing an appropriate mix of instruments that will reduce the negative social and economic impact of high energy prices. The transition towards carbon neutrality must be accompanied by efficient social measures, for example by supporting energy savings in households. Energy savings are becoming increasingly important in view of inflationary pressures and rising energy prices.

3. Strengthening Europe's defence capabilities and cyberspace security

Given the growing global instability, the Czech Presidency will focus on reinforcing security and defence capabilities, in particular in partnership with NATO. It will work specifically on supporting the implementation of key topics within the Strategic Compass. The development of long-term cooperation on strategic military systems is essential. In addition to ensuring the necessary capacities, including supporting capacities based on existing technologies, the Czech Presidency will pay attention to cooperation and investment in reducing technological dependence, in particular with regard to new and disruptive technologies, and to ensuring the resilience of critical value chains needed for these technologies. Strengthening related industrial capacities in the EU is also key.

At the same time, the Czech Presidency will address cyber threats and the geopolitical context of new technologies (and space). It will also focus on the rapid development of the so-called Hybrid toolbox, the fight against disinformation and the security of cyberspace. The Czech Presidency will pay particular attention to the cybersecurity of EU institutions, bodies and



agencies and to the EU space-based secure communication system. We will stress that the EU, together with democratic partners, actively shapes the international debate in international organisations to improve the security and stability of cyberspace.

4. Strategic resilience of the European economy

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russian aggression vis-à-vis Ukraine have led to an inflation shock, increased market uncertainty and have exposed the fragility of global supply chains. The Russian invasion has caused the greatest disruption of commodity markets in the last half-century. The EU must drastically reduce its dependence on hostile or unstable regimes. Striving for full self-sufficiency does not seem to be an immediately viable option for the EU. In order to strengthen strategic resilience, targeted support for technological competitiveness based on own production capacities, together with the deepening of free trade with democratic nations in the world, is essential.

From food, medicines to semiconductor chips, supply chains and their vulnerability need to be understood in detail and their resilience must consequently be strengthened. The availability of strategic raw materials and components must be secured for European firms. Particular emphasis will be placed on the security of IT supply chains. The Czech Presidency will work on accelerating the process of concluding trade agreements with democratic states and on deepening transatlantic cooperation in the framework of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) with a focus on strategic cooperation, including joint measures for supply chain resilience.

Accelerating the digitalisation and automation of European industry is also essential, enabling the expansion of competitive production in the EU, with a particular emphasis on strategic sectors. A more efficient circular economy will contribute to reducing the need for imports of primary materials.

Green and digital transitions must be implemented in such a way as to promote convergence towards the most advanced regions. At the same time, there is a need to support the development of the skills of Europeans to adapt to changing circumstances, which is a prerequisite for the global competitiveness of the EU. Support through EU investment policies, in particular cohesion policy, will play a crucial role in all these areas.

Finally, the internal market needs to be further deepened, especially in services and the digital economy, while improving the business environment, including support for science, research and innovation, which will lead to increased competitiveness of European firms. With a view of qualitatively deepening the digital internal market, the Czech Presidency will strive for the adoption of a pan-European tool for the secure and trustworthy proving of a citizen's identity, the so-called European Digital Identity Wallet, and the creation of an efficient and fair data market.



5. Resilience of democratic institutions

Russian aggression once again reminded us strongly that Europe's long-term prosperity and stability are based on functioning democratic mechanisms. The Czech Presidency will therefore focus on strengthening the resilience of institutions that have a major influence on maintaining and developing values of democracy and the rule of law in the EU. These include, for example, transparent financing of political parties, the independence of mass media and an open dialogue with citizens.

The Conference on the Future of Europe has created a unique space for citizens and especially for young people to debate the future of Europe and provide input for future EU policies. The Czech Presidency will work on making use of these ideas and the creation of a space for the continuation of the debate. While implementing the European Year of Youth 2022, the Presidency will put emphasis on improving dialogue with young people and promoting their participation in political/policy processes.

In addition, the Czech Presidency will also focus on respecting and strengthening freedoms and European values in both offline and online environments. Levelling the playing field for European and non-European firms, in particular in the field of environmental and climate impacts and respect for human rights, will create the conditions for the further development of trade in open markets. Together with other democratic states, the Presidency will work to ensure that fundamental rights and freedoms are respected in the digital environment and will push for global standards to build on the so-called human-centric approach. In a number of areas related to new technologies such as artificial intelligence, the EU has the opportunity to take advantage of being the 'first mover', which has the possibility to lay down the rules of the global game. The Czech Presidency also wants to contribute to strengthening the transparency of cryptocurrencies and reducing the risk of their misuse.

In the international context, it will implement the European Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, using relevant instruments, including potential sanction mechanisms. It will strengthen capacities to support civil society and independent media, as well as support partner countries' resilience against cyber and hybrid threats.