

IS CZECH PARADIPLMACY (ALSO) EUROSCEPTICAL: EXAMPLE FROM MORAVIAN-SILESIA REGION?

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Abstract. The article discusses paradiplomatic activities of Moravia-Silesia in Czechia. The region, former seat of heavy industry, has hugely benefitted from the EU membership, which has helped to mitigate the consequences of economic restructuring. Yet the locals tend to have even more Eurosceptical opinions than the rest of Czechia. Research showed that the region has most intensive co-operation with its Polish and Slovak neighbours and the EU funds have an important role in it. The co-operation with other European partners has been driven mainly by the need to get an inspiration for economic development and restructuring and what should be the role of European instruments in it. The economic co-operation is also the leading motive of partnerships with non-European regions, including the Chinese ones, which currently focus major attention on co-operating with the east of the EU, using it as their entrance to the single market.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Czech Republic is a prosperous country whose economy records one of the most dynamic GDP growths in the whole of Europe, as evidenced by Eurostat (2017a). According to the same sources, the unemployment rate was the lowest in the whole EU with 2.7% (Eurostat, 2017b) and the average wage increased by 7% compared to the previous year in 2017. As an open and export-oriented economy, it exploits the benefits of the EU single market. The Czech Republic has been a member of the European Union for more than 13 years, and the administrative work linked to it has formed a large part of the activities of public administration, companies, schools and other institutions. Under the conditions of the contemporary, globalized world, however, international co-operation is a *datum*, and for such export-oriented economies as the Czech one, absolutely inevitable.

Yet the Eurobarometer surveys, mapping the opinions of European citizens on topical issues, rank the Czechs amongst the most Eurosceptical nations. For a sizeable part of the Czech voters, giving up the country's membership in the EU and hermetically closing its borders is the best solution for the future development of the country, as shown by the parliamentary elections held in October 2017. The populist SPD (Svoboda a přímá demokracie / Freedom and Direct Democracy) is a successful political party in the whole country and it scores above the average, mainly in the east of the country, in the Moravian-Silesian Region.

The Moravian-Silesian Region and its capital, Ostrava, are festooned by a number of epithets, many of which are not exactly flattering. Part of them refers to the region's industrial character – as it has always been home to the heavy industry. Coal-mining and the steel industry caused *inter alia* the highest air pollution the whole of Europe at the core of the Ostrava conurbation (e.g. black Ostrava, Europe's black hole). Although the region has undergone major economic restructuring since 1989, when most of the coal-mines and steel factories were closed down, yet new jobs were created and no major social problems have appeared. The region is currently enjoying a prosperity similar to other Czech regions – except for Prague with its higher growth due to its exceptional role of growth-pole of the country.

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A similar case in all the 14 Czech self-administrative regions, which have functioned since 2000, also the Moravian-Silesian Region, with its seat in Ostrava, is active in international relations and it is much more internationalised than 20 years ago. All Czech towns and regions enter the field of international relations, noticeably more intensely than before the Czech Republic's accession to the EU in 2004. They actively entice investors, organize significant events in order to increase their visibility, enter international partnerships and implement international co-operation projects. Higher education institutions and their internationalization endeavours, linked to greater numbers of foreign students would deserve a chapter of their own. Likewise, thanks to the country's participation in the Schengen Area, in the EU, and the ability to exploit the four basic freedoms provided by the common internal market, a constantly growing number of foreigners settle down in the Czech Republic. Primarily bigger towns, including the Moravian-Silesian capital Ostrava, have to react to this fact.

2. RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODS

The main aim of this work is to describe, analyze and critically assess the Moravian-Silesian Region's forms of involvement in international relations. Having mentioned the Euroscepticism in the country – and especially in Moravia-Silesia – we will focus on the European dimension of these relations. Principal attention will be given to the behaviour of the Moravian-Silesian Regional Authority, we shall try to partly identify its interplay with the principal university of the region.

Two principal hypotheses shall be verified: firstly, we expect that most active co-operation activities to be undertaken with European regions and especially with our neighbours – the Polish and the Slovak regions. EU funds create an import incentive to have that co-operation. Secondly, we expect the partners from China to have been gaining a growing importance for the region.

Our working methods shall be based upon desk-research in the initial research phase, which will be complemented by interviews with the main stakeholders responsible for the Moravian-Silesian Region's international relation.

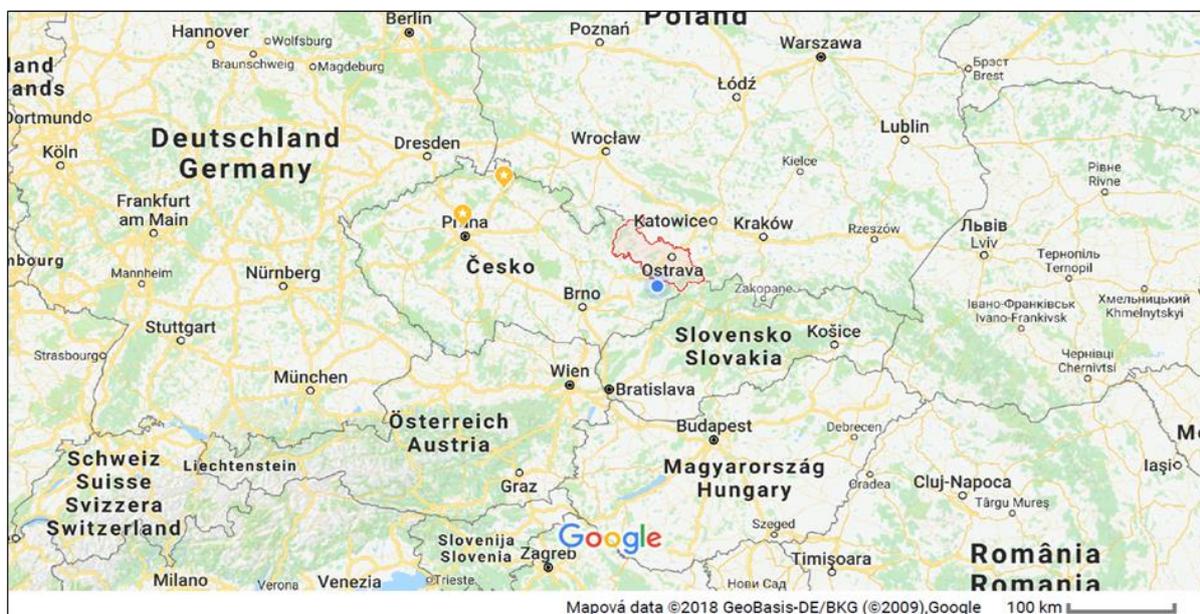


Fig. 1 – Localisation of the Moravian-Silesian Region in Central Europe
(Source: maps.google.com).

3. FRAMEWORK FOR PARADIPLOMACY

Paradiplomacy will be a key concept of this work, along with the attempt to identify its form in the east of Czechia. Paradiplomacy is one of the expressions describing the involvement of actors in international relations at lower-than-central levels. It has been the subject of scientific attention since the 1980s, (originally Czech) political scientist Duchacek started calling it “paradiplomacy” (e.g. Duchacek, 1984), which is currently the most frequent term used in this context. Probably, a more correct term, not indicating Paralympic Games, is “secondary foreign policy” (from German Neben-Außenpolitik), as proposed by Klatt and Wassenberg (2017),

Kincaid proposes using the term “constituent diplomacy”, linguistically based on the fact that it is the diplomacy of constitutively anchored entities (states, provinces, cantons, Länder, republics, municipal actors or ports) of national states (Kincaid, 1990). The different term proto-diplomacy refers to the foreign activities of regions seeking independence. The most frequently cited examples in this context are Quebec, Scotland or Catalonia (McHugh, 2015).

An increasing number of non-central governments, especially regions, enter interregional and cross-border co-operation without including the central level, which contributes to the increasing importance of the phenomenon called paradiplomacy (Duchacek, 1984). According to Duchacek (1984), paradiplomacy is a necessary consequence of the process of regionalization, which implies a delegation of the central state authorities' competences to municipalities and regions. This brings them a number of benefits, for example, allowing the exchange of experience in solving specific problems within the context of the international environment.

Duchacek (1990) is convinced that the activity of non-central government actors implies the federal organization of the state because it requires a pluralist democracy with two seats of power where “... none of these levels should be tied to the other's liking”. This belief is shared by a number of other authors (for example Lecours, 2002 or Fry, 1993). However, some British (Casson and Dardanelli, 2012) or French authors (Wassenberg 2016) point to the fact that local governments in their countries are increasingly involved in secondary foreign policy activities, too.

After the Second World War, the broader application of foreign policy was released from “core issues” of the type of national security and the balance of power to the benefit of other themes (Duchacek, 1990). Current international relations are touching on a far greater number of issues related to the developed “welfare state”, which often leads representatives of non-central public actors to influence and often extend the spheres in which states have international relations. For example, cross-border commuters who cross the border daily / weekly to work in another EU Member-State (Klatt and Wassenberg, 2017).

In Europe, territorial co-operation between non-central bodies was first developed in the area of cross-border co-operation in the late 1950s. Cross-border co-operation has led to the creation of co-operative units most commonly referred to as Euroregion. Since 1990, support for cross-border co-operation through the establishment of a cross-border co-operation programme (INTERREG) has been included in the EU structural policies, leading to a significant increase of co-operative cross-border initiatives (eg. Böhm, 2013 or Scott, 2016). It offered the possibility to have cross-border co-operation that led European regional and local actors to lobby the Council of Europe to force national states to sign a European Framework Convention on Cross-border Co-operation, in Madrid 1980. The Madrid Convention narrows the concept of cross-border co-operation and also significantly eases its implementation for non-central government actors.

Generally speaking, the right to apply the “trial / error” method can still be attributed to a relatively new topic of secondary foreign policy, e.g. the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec have already closed most of their foreign offices, as well as many regional offices in Brussels, pointing to their low efficiency (Keating, 1999). Moreover, in addition to the platform for international

dialogue, many international territorial networks do not have a relevant content agenda and therefore have been condemned to gradual disappearance, such as the Canadian-American Council of Cascades (Klatt, Wassenberg, 2017).

Authors associated with the theory of new regionalism in international relations underline the fact that the growing role of the EU as a macro-region contributes to closing the gap between internal and international policies (Hettne, 1994; Joenniemi, 1997). The EU is increasingly inviting the regions to be involved in the consultation process, making them co-responsible for formulating European policies, which is also evident in the establishment of the Committee of the Regions (Balme, 1996; Goldsmith, 1993). The existing role of the regions as a “bottom-up process” is changing at the age of new regionalism, with the regions competing in the name of their economic development, characterized by an effort to attract investment, skilled labour and prestigious projects (The Dictionary of Human Geography 2009, p. 639). The concept of a ‘Europe of Regions’ explains, among others, the more active involvement of regions in international relations, as described by Keating (2008). Paasi stresses that regions have become ‘... particularly significant in the EU where both the making of the Union itself and the “Europe of regions” are concrete manifestations of the re-scaling of state spaces and the assignment of new meanings to territory’ (Paasi, 2009). The coming into existence of the four principal freedoms of movement in the EU (goods, capital, services and people) in turn encouraged the process which Boesler (1997) describes as *Entgrenzung* (debordering). *Entgrenzung* should contribute to a decreasing role of national states and the increasing importance of regions, which now are more engaged in secondary foreign policy.

Traditional hegemony in foreign policy implementation, national states and their diplomatic services, firstly looked at secondary foreign policy activities suspected of being an intruder of sovereignty (Duchacek, 1990), a key-element on which the Westphalian system was built. According to the realists, states have to act in international affairs as a whole. In addition, the rise of modern (national) states was in most cases accompanied by absolutism, which we can characterize as the attempts of monarchs, dictators and other leaders to consolidate power against rival political, economic and military actors (Kincaid, 1990). For example, government and international relations have been centralized in the US during the international crises, especially during both world wars (Kincaid, 1990).

Fear of threatening the position of a sovereign state with secondary foreign policy by sub-national governments has long held back its real implementation, as the conflict and competition on foreign policy competences were perceived as threatening the central state’s position, although conflict and political competition is a key-part of democratic governance (Kincaid, 1990).

Several research activities focused also on paradiplomacy in a unique Czech context, mainly Drulák’s (jointly with Königová and Kratochvíl, 2005) and Dostál’s (2017) papers are worth-mentioning. Dostál (2017) distinguishes four phases of “Czech-made” regional para-diplomacy: initiation (2000–2003), Europeanization (2004–2010), economization (2010–2015), and embryonic, initiative political emancipation (2016 – to the present).

4. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE MORAVIAN-SILESIA REGION

The Moravian-Silesian Region is one of the 14 administrative regions of the Czech Republic. It is located in the north-eastern part of its historical region of Moravia and in the east of the historical region of Silesia, which is currently divided between the Czech Republic and Poland, where more or less 85% of Silesian territory belongs. The region borders on the Olomouc Region to the west and the Zlín Region to the south. It also borders on two other countries – Poland (Silesian and Opole Voivodeships) to the north and Slovakia to the east (Žilina Region). The total population of the region was 1,244 200 (48.83% men, 51.20% women), most of the population is urban, 62% living in towns with over 20,000 inhabitants (Šprochová, 2015).

4.1 International Co-operation in Strategical Documents of the Moravian-Silesian Region

The developmental priorities of the Moravian-Silesian Region are formulated in several strategical documents. The one with the longest term of applicability (although last updated in 2012) is the *Development Strategy of the Moravian-Silesian Region 2009–2020*. This strategy is based on 5 goals, only the fifth of which explicitly mentions the support of secondary foreign policies, as it aims at strengthening cross-border ties and the co-operation of the region with neighbouring regions in the framework of the European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC) TRITIA. At present, however, one has to observe that the goal of creating a financial instrument supporting co-operation within the framework of EGTC has not been met, and what is more, one of the founding members of the co-operation, Opole Voivodeship is likely to resign its membership in the EGTC.

The informational value of this strategical document, however, somewhat diminished by the fact that it was last updated in 2012. Thus, we have focused on other strategical documents, namely, the program statements of regional governments. The program statement of the left-wing governments – socialists and communists, managing the region between 2012 and 2016 – mentions great expectations linked to the EGTC TRITIA co-operation with the Žilina Region, and the Silesian and Opole Voivodeships. In 2018, we can say these hopes have remained rather unfulfilled.

The program statement also explicitly mentions the ambition to “start an active economic diplomacy supporting both the export from the Moravian-Silesian Region and [foreign] investment targeting the area in a way that provides business activities the support of this instrument in the interest of their own success, the creation of new job opportunities and the [improvement of] the quality of life in the region” (Moravian-Silesian Region, 2012; our translation).

The program declaration of the 2016–2020 right-centre regional government describes Moravia-Silesia as a “region, which is not at the periphery, but on the contrary, is in the centre of a strong Central European region co-operating with and linked by transport to adjacent regions in Poland and Slovakia” (Moravian-Silesian Region, 2016; our translation). The document likewise presupposes a closer co-operation, especially with its Slovakian and Polish partners, in the field of tourism, when it demands “a better use of the tourist potential of the region – the diversity of the countryside and the [region’s] favourable location at the border with Poland and Slovakia”. Overall, however, the document does not give the impression that international co-operation would be a priority for the new regional government – with the exception of Polish and Slovakian neighbours. The President of the regional council, however, defends the program statement’s goals arguing that it envisions international co-operation as an instrument subordinated to the aim of the region’s economic success. The present leadership’s strong emphasis on economic issues, and its addressing the unsatisfactory situation in the region’s natural environment and air quality indeed strongly influences the Moravian-Silesian Region’s implementation of secondary foreign policies.

4.2 Partnerships of the Moravian-Silesian Region

At present, the Moravian-Silesian Region has valid partnership agreements with altogether 12 regions (in essence, these are agreements of co-operation with EU regions and memoranda with regions from other parts of the world). In addition, they have also signed non-binding memoranda about the intention to establish co-operation mostly with Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean regions (the last one primarily as a result of the activity of Korean investors in the Hyundai Region in particular), which, however, in the overwhelming majority of cases have remained in their declaratory phase and are not operational.

During the first years of operating the Moravian-Silesian Region partnership, agreements were primarily signed with neighbouring regions (Silesian Voivodeship and Žilina Autonomous Region)

and with Lorraine. In the last eight years, with the exception of the signing of a partnership with Veneto, the list of partner regions has only been extended by entities from the East – in particular by two regions in China, and by one region each from Kazakhstan, the Ukraine and Vietnam. The following part provides an overview of the Moravian-Silesian Region's most important activities in the field of secondary foreign policies since its establishment.

4.2.1 Co-operation with neighbouring regions

This section is devoted to the Moravian-Silesian Region's co-operation with its Polish (Silesian and Opole Voivodeships) and Slovakian (Žilina Region) neighbours, which was initially bilateral and later on it changed into multiple cross-border co-operation within the framework of the TRITIA European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation. Some regional officials currently express the opinion that, from their perspective, the grouping's results have been a disappointment so far. Since I participated in the establishment of this grouping and actively co-operated with it until 2013, the possible reasons for such an unflattering assessment have raised my interest, and I have tried to analyse the grouping's benefits from a broader perspective.

The fundamental motivation for the Moravian-Silesian Region's co-operation with its neighbours is their geographic location, that is, their directly neighbouring position and the common border. Partnerships were established with the Silesian Voivodeship and the Žilina Region relatively early after the establishment of the region (in 2001 with the Polish partner, and in 2003 with the Slovakian one). The regions in question share more than a common border: they have similar problems, as they are all peripheral regions far from the metropolises of their nation states. Since a whole range of towns and villages in the region had been actively co-operating with settlements in Slovakia and Poland, the establishment of co-operation on the regional level was a logical step. The co-operation agreement with the Žilina Region is contractually defined to cover the areas of economic and regional development, regional planning and tourism, environmental protection, transport infrastructure, culture, sport and European integration (Co-operation Agreement with the Žilina Region, 2003).

The agreement with the Polish Region extends the above list with co-operation and knowledge exchange in the field of restructuring the heavy industry (Co-operation Agreement with the Silesian Voivodeship, 2001). Gaining financial resources from the European Union for the support of European regional co-operation and for projects associated with this area is another important source of motivation.

Co-operation has been active in a whole range of different areas and has been facilitated by the existence of various subsistence programs that the regions could have used already in the period before EU 2004 enlargement, and the financial activity which has become even more intensive since 2004. The partnering regions have primarily used these resources primarily for co-operation in reconstructing roads, but the use of mainly Czech-Polish INTERREG programme extended also into other thematic fields and started being the dominant point of co-operation between Moravia-Silesia and its neighbours. Besides, European Funds was also a motivating factor leading to establishing the European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation.

Crisis management is a specific area of co-operation, resulting in the signing of two agreements in 2008. The first agreement was signed between the Moravian-Silesian Region and the Silesian Voivodeship, and a similar one was subsequently made with the Opole Voivodeship. These contracts allow both sides to approach each other with requests for help in case of natural disasters and other exceptional situations (Böhm, Jeřábek, Dokoupil, 2016).

EGTC TRITIA

The European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC) is an instrument, which should provide cross-border actors with the possibility to function as one legal entity. The original idea of the initiators of this regulation was to shift cross-border co-operation to a qualitatively higher level.

However, the practice has shown that entities that did not have such a long history of co-operation were also involved in the formation of these groups. This was also an example of the establishment of EGTC TRITIA: in 2009, the management of four partner regions: Moravian-Silesian (CZ), Opole, Silesian (both PL) and Žilina (SK) decided, shortly after the regulation was transposed into the national legislations of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, to deepen their co-operation by establishing the EGTC (Böhm, Jeřábek, Dokoupil, 2016).

Partner regions, according to the official declaration, set up the EGTC, deciding to deepen the existing cross-border co-operation, which should result in a common cross-border region strategy based on identified key-areas. In the following four areas, the founders were able to find an intersection of common interest and competences conferred on them: • transport, • the economy, • tourism, • energy and the environment.

These four sectoral objectives were complemented by a cross-cutting objective with the ambition of “smart implementation of projects and programs with financial support from the EU funds”, being the primary motive of all founders. Their main objective was to administer their own INTERREG multiple cross-border co-operation programme in the 2014 – 2020 programming period. As the ambition to administer EU funds has greatly disrupted the existing structure of cross-border co-operation programs between the three countries, it met with the absolute rejection of stakeholders responsible for the INTERREG programmes at national levels.

Once it was clear that EGTC TRITIA would not be directly involved in INTERREG implementation, its founders lost much of their interest in its functioning, tending to assess its contribution with major reservations. Yet the research (Böhm, Dokoupil, Jeřábek, 2016) evidenced that TRITIA contributed to establishing sustainable cross-border networks and helped implementing significantly more cross-border co-operation projects than before its creation.

4.2.2 Partnership with Other European Regions

Lorraine (France)

A co-operation with this region dates to the 1990s through developmental agencies operating in both regions. Both are similar in terms of their industrial history and the necessity to restructure their economies, both are border regions. As the co-operation agreement was signed in 2001, a year after the first regional elections in the Czech Republic, gaining some experience with regional administration was a further incentive (Šprochová, 2015).

At the beginning, the main focus of co-operation was on exchanging knowledge about restructuring the industry and the regional economy, regenerating brownfields, and business support. This was followed by the schooling of the employees of offices of the regional council and other regional institutions in the areas of governance, strategical planning and regional development, environmental protection, education and the effective use of EU funds. In the 1999–2007 periods meetings between from Lorraine and Moravia-Silesia companies were held.

Lorraine is a member of the Grande Région/Großregion project, which had at its disposition its own financial instrument in the 2007–2013 period for supporting mutual French-German-Walloon-Luxembourgian cross-border co-operation. The Moravian-Silesian Region had the same ambition, and it tried to attain this aim by its involvement in the establishment of EGTC TRITIA, hence the co-operation also focussed on this field.

This co-operation was very successful at fulfilling expectations. The administrative reform in France, which dramatically reduced the number of autonomous regions, became a significant challenge: since 2017, Lorraine has been a part, along with Alsace and Champagne-Ardenne, of the administrative region Grand Est, with its center in the Alsatian Strasbourg. Thus, it remains a question of how this co-operation will work with this border area. For the time being, we have been waiting to see what happens.

North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany)

The Moravian-Silesian Region had a co-operation agreement with North Rhine-Westphalia since 2002, which, however, was not been actively used in past years. The Ruhr district was faced similar demographic and socio-economic problems as the Moravian-Silesian Region did, and it is still undergoing a successful process of restructuring, and could also offer inspiration in the area of green technologies. In the light of these parallel patterns, the representatives of the region, in co-operation with the German partners, decided to renew their co-operation in 2015.

A key-area of co-operation for the Moravian-Silesian Region is the transfer of knowledge in the field regenerating the region as such. The aim of the program of co-operation, signed in 2017, is the development of co-operation especially in the fields of research, development and innovation, electro mobility, industry 4.0, and smart cities and communities. Mutual co-operation might take the form of specific projects that could be implemented in the framework of European financial instruments. Moravia-Silesia aims to pay especially close attention to the methods and practices that the German partners had used in the strategic planning of their development, i.e. to their so-called masterplans.

North-East England

The northeast of England (with its center in Newcastle) was a potentially attractive partner for the Moravian-Silesian Region, thanks to its similarity, structural handicaps and the need to restructure its industrial foundations as North-East England's economy was also dominated by the heavy industry for a long time. Thanks to the somewhat puzzling administrative structure of Great Britain, however an institutional partner on regional level, able to sign a partnership agreement, could not be found. It is also necessary to mention that during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the interest of the British side in establishing contacts progressively weakened and finally disappeared.

Veneto (Italy)

The Moravian-Silesian Region was approached by the Venetian honorary consul of the Czech Republic with a proposal of co-operation with the region of Veneto. The resulting agreement, signed in 2012, focused primarily on tourism, economic education, and educational co-operation (Co-operation Agreement with Veneto, 2012). In actual fact, the region was not able to meet its expectations, as the interest of the Italian partner in doing so was absolutely minimal.

4.2.3. Partners from the Post-Soviet Space

Vologda Oblast (Russia)

The initiative to establish co-operation with this territory was provided by private businesses of the Moravian-Silesian Region with business interests in the Vologda Oblast. In the first five years, co-operation had the character of courtesy calls in the form of official visits. The turning point was the year 2010, when there was a notable development of co-operation, and the two sides started thinking about specific projects. The tangible manifestations of this co-operation were exchange programmes for young firefighters, culture and children. Inter-university co-operation also held a privileged position.

As far as the field of economics is concerned, the region has not yet been able to find strong actors in the realm of business, amongst small and medium-sized enterprises, and developing additional trade partnerships, in spite of the rather significant economic potential of both regions. Increasing the significance of Ostrava Airport and introducing regular scheduled flights between Moscow and Ostrava have been priorities for a longer period of time, and there has been a number of talks with carriers, but this process has stopped as a result of recent developments in Ukraine, which make a further development of the Czech-Russian relations quite problematic. The region is likewise trying to increase the number of Russian tourists at local spas and other tourist destinations. Its main obstacles are, from the perspective of the Moravian-Silesian Region's representatives, the Russian

side's retaliatory measures in reaction to sanctions that the EU introduced against Russia after the intensification of the international conflict in the East of Ukraine.

Donetsk Oblast (Ukraine)

The main aims of the memorandum are economic co-operation and exchange, scientific and technological co-operation, technology supply, environmental protection, education and health, culture, sports and tourism (Memorandum on a Co-operation with the Donetsk Oblast, 2011). After introductory meetings and diplomatic missions which had been considered successful, the co-operation with Donetsk Oblast was suspended as a result of the conflict in the region.

West Kazakhstan Region

The initiative for establishing a co-operation came from the Czech-Middle Asian Chamber of Commerce, which declared that it is preparing large infrastructural projects in Kazakhstan. Thus, the vision of a close economic co-operation was a significant motivational factor for this partnership (Šprochová, 2015). Therefore, the agreement signed by the Moravian-Silesian Region and the West Kazakhstan Region focusses primarily on the development of economic and business co-operation, and in relation to it, the support of creating and developing relationships in the following areas: the economy, the industry, and scientific and technical co-operation (Memorandum on a Co-operation with the West Kazakhstan Region, 2010). Attention is also paid to co-operation in the fields of agriculture, environmental protection, science, education, commerce, healthcare, culture, tourism and sport. The co-operation with this region, however, according to the representatives of the region, is stagnating, and the expectations which the Moravian-Silesian Region had at the time of signing the memorandum in 2010 have not been met yet.

4.2.4 Partners from China

In the last five years, the Czech regions, and not only them, have established co-operation with various entities from China, a country which has shown a heretofore unparalleled active interest in post-communist Europe, that is to say, in Central European and Baltic states, the Balkans, as well as in the Eastern periphery of the EU: Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldova. This interest is mainly economically motivated: Beijing has been trying to find outlets for investment and export capacities on the territory of the Eastern part of the EU. This area provides one third of that EU market segment, which is relevant for the Chinese investment policies, which reflect its oversized capacities in certain fields, above all in the transport infrastructure, as well as in the building and power industries.

The summit of prime ministers from sixteen post-communist states of Europe (without Ukraine, Belorussia and Moldova) and the PRC, held in 2012 in Warsaw, institutionalized the China+16 partnership (16+1, also called after this founding event as the Warsaw Initiative), and announced a so-called "Twelve-point Program," which formulates an extensive form of economic and cultural co-operation (Goralczyk, 2017). This programme offers in particular the possibility to finance common projects of the Chinese state or private entities and their local European partners to a total 10 billion USD credit range, covered by the PRC's funds. Roughly one fifth of these funds, i.e. 2 billion USD, is to be used for supporting academic co-operation. Further summits have since followed the Warsaw Initiative, a number of ministerial meetings have been held, as well as a whole range of visits of industrial, trade and investment delegations, not to mention the visits of cultural, scientific and school representatives (Fürst, 2015).

Through this program, Beijing also intensifies its pressure on Brussels. It is not only through its assertive politics in relation to the whole EU and through its bilateral agreements with large EU states, but what is more, it itself establishes an additional multilateral structure, in which its European partners (as well as the Eastern and South-Eastern outsiders) do not act as a coherent and

institutionally linked group, and where the center of this multilateral association is integrated into the managing state structures of the PRC through a special Secretariat, which is directly headquartered at the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Academic studies, assessing the functionality of this partnership, express serious reservations and observe that the program's goals have not yet been able to fulfill the aims declared in the original plans (cf. e.g. Goralczyk, 2017).

In the opinion of interviewed regional experts, who have dealt with the co-operation with China, the Chinese partners are fully aware of their own priorities and are able to push through those areas of co-operation they themselves are primarily interested in. Thus, in some cases, the Moravian-Silesian Region has played the role of the more passive partner. It is also necessary to mention that the present regional council has a more reserved attitude to the possibilities of co-operation with China than previous administrations had.

Jiangsu Province

The initial impulse for establishing a partnership was the already-mentioned Warsaw Initiative. From a long-term perspective, this partnership is perceived by the region as a strategic one, and this is primarily because of China's present standing as the fastest developing economy of the world and the country's aspirations to become the world's biggest economy. Besides economic interests, co-operation in the fields of education, culture, tourism, environmental protection, or mining and using natural resources have also been motivating factors (Memorandum on the Further Development of Amicable Exchange and Co-operation with the Province of Jiangsu, 2013).

A memorandum between the two regions was signed in 2013, thus a number of activities is still in its early stage, and the regions in question can be said to be gradually gaining knowledge about each other. Co-operation has reached the utmost in the field of education, where the Technical University of Ostrava and Soochow University have established contractual co-operation. Besides education, co-operation also focusses on culture, where one can mention as an example the Ostrava Chinese Gala. The main priority, however, is economic co-operation, which, in the opinion of the region's representatives will require long-term efforts to set up. As a further result of the Moravian-Silesian Region's co-operation with this province, the city of Ostrava has also established a partnership with Suzhou, one of the province's important centers.

Hebei Province

The co-operation, concluded in 2015, is about to focus on supporting regional companies and influx of investments with the aim of creating new jobs. Further points of common development are co-operation in the fields of culture, environmental protection, and the support of education, innovation, science and new technologies.

Another Chinese province, Jiangsu, has also expressed its interest in co-operation, the leaders of the Moravian-Silesian Region, however, are yet to make their decision on this matter. In light of the fact that the region has a new council, as well as thanks to the different priorities of the present regional coalition, this remains an open question.

Representatives of the regional council of the Moravian-Silesian Region responsible for international relations, mostly agree on having observed the Chinese side's general interest in co-operating with universities. Due to the fact that it is very simple for the region to approach local universities, and they are also very co-operative, one could observe a forthcoming attitude amongst the questioned council members towards Chinese partners in this field. Thus, regional representatives have also negotiated other advantageous forms of partnership with Chinese entities – the scholarship for students of the Technical University of Ostrava provided by the telecommunication firm Huawei could be mentioned as an example.

The support of pursuing international co-operation with Chinese partners has taken further forms: for example, the local hockey club has established a co-operation with a Chinese partner.

4.2.5 Other partners

Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa Provinces (Vietnam)

An association of Vietnamese citizens operates in Ostrava, which initiated a potential co-operation with Vietnamese regions with the aim of strengthening connections in the field of education and achieving a closer co-operation in that of business. An agreement was signed in 2001 with Khanh Hoa Province, which was followed by a subsequent memorandum in 2009. Binh Thuan Province only established a partnership with the Moravian-Silesian Region in 2012 (Šprochová, 2015).

A substantial part of co-operation should consist in economic development, and especially the exchange of information with the aim of facilitating an entry to domestic markets. The only tangible outcome at the moment is exchange of educators and students. The Technical University of Ostrava, in co-operation with Vietnamese partners, has already implemented a so-called double-degree program, which ensures a number of students from Vietnam every year.

Co-operation with the United Arab Emirates

The Moravian-Silesian Region signed a memorandum of co-operation with the Emirate of Sharjah and the Al Nahyan neighbourhood of Abu Dhabi, with the aim of supporting an exchange of experience between a set of healthcare, educational and cultural institutions. They are to co-operate also in the field of medical rehabilitation and spa-cure of disabled children and their education.

4.3 Other important international activities

4.3.1 Representation in Brussels

In comparison to other Czech regions, the Moravian-Silesian Region decided to have its interests represented in Brussels amongst the last. Permanent representation was established in 2010 and shortly cancelled two years later. In the end, the whole situation was solved – similarly to some other regions – by outsourcing part of the services to a transnational consortium located in Brussels.

The functioning of the Region's representation was marked by the region's politicians' striking lack of interest (with a few exceptions) in this issue and by their inability to appreciate its merits. A low level of understanding how lobbying is performed on a European level, the language barrier of the overwhelming majority of these representatives and a lack of co-ordination with other relevant entities of the region (major cities and universities) have been the main reasons for the inability to use the potential an effective representation of the region could have. The inability of political leaders to formulate aims for those representing the region's interests was a significant problem. An actual analysis of the needs of regional actors has also been absent, along with a formulation of needs in relation to such an analysis.

This incompetence of regional politicians has several causes: the first was their lack of understanding of the operation of European institutions and an inadequate effort to understand these principles. An example of this is refusal of a membership on the European Committee of the Regions because of uncertain benefits for the region. Another barrier was the regional political leaders' (lack of) foreign language proficiency.

At present, the region's administration is preparing a new approach to representation in Brussels, which it wishes to more intensively integrate with the region's distinctively articulated endeavour of becoming a smart region. In the framework of this more complex approach, the region is also planning a more active *modus operandi* in economic diplomacy. The current president of the regional council is planning to revive the idea of the region having its own, direct representation in Brussels, where these representatives main aim would be to help negotiate own financial instruments for the 2020+ period.

4.3.2 Financial Support for Internationalising Regional Research

The leaders of the Moravian-Silesian Region emphasize its industrial character, and explicitly declare that the Region endeavours to co-operate more intensively with universities and high schools of the region in such as to have primarily more alumni with a technical education. Furthermore, as the job market is unable to supply enough experts using its own resources (partially also as a result of a general demographic slump), the acting president of the regional council also considers a scholarship programme with the aim of attracting students to the region from countries with a strong tradition of technical education as a highly realistic option: certain Siberian regions of Russia have been explicitly mentioned, and other Slav countries are also taken into consideration.

The region did support the universities' international activities also in the past. In the last few years, specific grant schemes have also been established with this aim: for example, in the years 2015 and 2016, these schemes provided projects of all three public universities in the region with financial support up to 15 million CZK (cca. 600,000 EUR) in total. The present regional council recognizes their predecessors' approach as a valid one, and intends to continue with these schemes, in connection with their ambition to create a "smart region."

An emphasis on economic diplomacy and on areas with a higher added value was to be expected also in view of the staffing of the present regional council, led by a former rector of the Technical University of Ostrava, who was responsible for a set of significant scientific and research projects. The Moravian-Silesian Region will try to establish a co-operation with Israel, whose scientific and research institutions represent a considerable attraction for the region's universities. For that matter, Israel has been a significant interest of Czech economic diplomacy for a considerable time, which has included the establishment of the post of scientific ambassador to this country.

5. EUROPEAN TOPICS LEAD THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA

Based on the findings presented in the previous chapters, we can say that the Moravian-Silesian Region's initiatives for co-operation can be grouped into the following geographical areas: neighbouring regions of Poland and Slovakia; EU partners; partners from China; partners from the post-Soviet area; other partners.

Table 1

Co-operation between the Moravian-Silesian Region and its foreign partners

	Economic motivation for co-operation	Political motivation for co-operation	Importance of program incentives	The partner's Geopolitical motivation for co-operation	Assessment of co-operation level of intensity
PL and SK	high	high	high	n.a.	high
EU	medium	medium	medium	n.a.	medium
China/Asia	high	low	medium	high	medium
Post-Soviet Area	high	low	low	high	low
North America	medium	medium	n.a.	Low	low

Source: author's research.

European issues, including partner regions

The European dimension is the most dominant one, besides, in the opinion of responding experts, it facilitates the creation of a meaningful agenda. In the opinion of the present president of the regional council, embedding the Moravian-Silesian Region and the whole country in the structures of the European Union is a key-point for the region, on which the implementation of all other foreign

relations is based. The majority of those of the region's active partners with whom the region has binding contracts come from the European Union member states: they are, first and foremost, the neighbouring regions of the Silesian and Opole Voivodeships and the Žilina Region, and to a lesser extent Lorraine and the newly active Ruhr Valley. The agenda linked with these regions' EU membership, and with the opportunities resulting from it, is also the main content of these co-operations: the region has been implementing projects of cross-border co-operation with its Slovakian and Polish partners. The attempt to intensify this co-operation in the framework of EGTC TRITIA is at present assessed by regional representatives with certain reservations, if they do not directly speak of wasted opportunities. Yet a closer analysis showed that the institutionalization of these co-operations has unquestionable.

Although the Moravian-Silesian Region develops co-operation most intensively with neighbouring regions in Poland and Slovakia, it also has partners from other countries of the European Union. There has been a continuous co-operation of development agencies with Lorraine and renewed relations with the Ruhr District, where the Moravian-Silesian Region aims to pay special attention to ways the German partners used to approach strategic development planning.

In contrast to co-operation with Lorraine, which, for the time being is still functional, and to the promising reopening of relationships with the Ruhr District, one has to evaluate the partnership with Veneto more soberly: at present, it brings nothing of value, and is likely to fade out completely.

After 2004, representatives of the Moravian-Silesian Region gained the opportunity to work in the European Committee of Regions, nevertheless, they were not really able to find their place there. An inability to phrase its expectations and tasks in relation to Brussels left its mark on the operation of the regional council until the present regional government has taken over.

Co-operation with China and Other Asian Partners

For China, the Czech Republic is interesting since it is a member-state of the European Union. The motivation is economic: Beijing attempts to employ the PRC's investment and export capacities in the Eastern part of the EU, that is to say, in one third of the EU's market. It finds possibilities for investment in sectors which are oversized in China, above else in the transport infrastructure, the building industry and the energy industry. The "16+1 Warsaw Initiative", institutionalized in 2012, creates an extensive form of economic and cultural co-operation. This programme, offers above else, financing from the Chinese state and private entities with European partners from the PRC's financial resources (Goralczyk, 2017).

The two previous regional councils enthusiastically joined the schemes of co-operation with Chinese partners. This resulted in signing agreements with two Chinese provinces and in finding Chinese partners for the Technical University of Ostrava and the city of Ostrava. The Moravian-Silesian Region even created its own program of incentives for co-operation of the region's universities with Chinese partners. It should be mentioned, however, that the region's present council is not likely to highlight co-operation with China to the same extent as the previous ones did, even though it is not about to obstruct it in any way, either.

The shape of mutual co-operation with Chinese entities is largely extent determined by the needs of the Chinese side, which shows a noticeable tendency to dictate the fields of co-operation. Besides the strong emphasis on the economically beneficial character of partnership, particularly in the form of technology transfer and suitable opportunities for investment, the Chinese have a strong interest in areas where the Czechs have a high professional level.

The Chinese central government and its geopolitical ambitions stand behind the increasing number of initiatives for co-operation, which makes these partnerships somewhat different from other cases of co-operation. Chinese provinces, towns and universities are at present under pressure to find foreign partners, for which the 16+1 partnership program provides a positive motivation, as well. Partnerships with Chinese entities have many possible pitfalls and complications, including the language barrier, nevertheless, the difference in the two countries' political systems is not mentioned by any of the two sides.

In 2017, the region extended the portfolio of its co-operative partners with two Arab Emirates. The key-areas of co-operation will be rehabilitation and spa-cure, with focus also on disabled children and their education, and support for innovative business and linking the business milieu with the academic sphere. According to representatives of the regions, parallels are obvious - the Moravian-Silesian economy have coal as the center of interest, the same as the Arab partners with oil.

Co-operation with post-Soviet countries

The Moravian-Silesian Region co-operates with partners from the post-Soviet area. The Moravian-Silesian Region has been co-operating with the Vologda region since 2005. The interim co-operative results already achieved are dominated by youth exchanges. At present, co-operation is rather stagnant, its main obstacle being Russia's retaliatory measures on sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia after the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

So far now, unfulfilled expectations have brought a partnership between the region and the West Kazakh Region. It was also concluded during the first socialist government thanks to the lobbying of large industrial players, and it has not yet been significantly fulfilled.

At the deadlock, the partnership with the Donetsk Region of Ukraine has now collapsed. The region and the city await the resolution of the conflict. An attempt to open a consulate of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic in Ostrava was made in 2016, but the Czech authorities have made a rather strenuous break.

Other partners

The table and a figure below clearly shows that the Moravian-Silesia Region ignores more or less co-operation with African and Latin American partners, co-operation with the USA – is limited to the co-organisation of the NATO days.



Fig. 2 – Co-operation partners of Moravia-Silesia (Source: author's elaboration).

6. CONCLUSION

As a general feature, the principle motive for international co-operation is economic and transfer of best practices, e.g. the restructuring of the heavy industry, the establishment of development agencies and territorial partnerships. A mutual familiarization in the areas of culture, history and traditions, goes hand in hand with setting up economic co-operation. Economic diplomacy has been an important priority of both the last and the present regional government. Economic co-operation on a regional level can, indeed, open doors for companies and other entities, especially schools, but the potential of success rests with the companies themselves. The region plays the role of mediator in the co-operation with foreign regions, and facilitates the contact of partners from various territories. However, the question to what extent it succeeds in doing it remains.

Dostál (2017) distinguishes four phases of Czech regional para-diplomacy: initiation, Europeanization, economization, and embryonic initiative of political emancipation and Moravia-Silesia went in line with these phases. In the first phase, following the establishment of the region in 2000, Moravia-Silesia sought partnerships with neighbouring regions across the border and typologically similar regions of Lorraine and the Ruhr district in North Rhine-Westphalia. In that period, shortly before 2004 EU accession, there was also a marked interest in co-operation with Western European regions. There was a correspondence between getting involved in international co-operation and the conviction that establishing foreign contacts play a meaningful role in the development of the region, both for cultural reasons and for the direct EU financial aid. At the same time, the necessity of “accommodating to international trends” (Drulák *et al.*, 2005) was also mentioned as an important reason to implement international co-operation. This phenomenon of copycat behaviour, or “me-tooism” (Soldatos, 1990), was another factor contributing to the development of regional para-diplomacy in the Czech Republic.

The phase of Europeanization can be dated between 2004 and 2009, that is, to the period of the Czech Republic’s first few years as a EU member. The main characteristic feature of that period was the effort to learn to adequately and fully use the benefits of integration. The region took steps for its later intensification of cross-border co-operation with Polish and Slovakian regions by initiating an activity that subsequently led to the establishment of TRITIA European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC).

The fight against economic stagnation was the leitmotif of Moravian-Silesian paradiplomacy after 2010. Thus, an accompanying feature of this phase was the establishment of partnerships with regions in the developing markets outside Europe. Dostál (2017) names the last phase the embryonic politization of the regions’ foreign relations. Worth to mentioning in this context is the fact that the region was led from 2008 to 2016 by a left-wing coalition of socialists and communists. This resulted in concluding new agreements, mainly with partners from the post-Soviet space and the communist countries of Asia – China and Vietnam. The reverse of this trend was recorded only after a change of regional administration in 2016, when the stress fell again on European partners, mainly in the Ruhr District.

Despite the Czechs’ belonging to the European leaders of Euroscepticism, the behaviour of the analysed Moravian-Silesian Regional administration offers a slightly different picture: the international activities of the regional administration are predominantly European. Even non-European partners, mainly two Chinese provinces, appreciate the Moravian-Silesian Region as a EU partner. Previous regional administrations focussed mainly on developing cross-border relations with neighbours and using INTERREG funds to support these relations by concrete projects, but found no added value in being more active on a European scale – with one exception of “reconversion-based “ co-operation with Lorraine. The current administration seems to be more aware of the need to talk to

European institutions and tries to intensify its contacts with the Ruhr Region, as well as with European institutions in Brussels. Yet, it is evident that possible “Czexit” would dramatically reduce the volume of regional paradiplomacy to limited contacts with neighbours, most likely without any external financial support.

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