
POLICY PAPER**Chinese media coverage of the Czech Republic and the Xi's visit in Prague****Runya T. Qiaoan**

This policy paper analyses the Chinese media reporting on the Czech Republic. The first section offers a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the recent Chinese media reaction to the Chinese president Xi Jinping's visit to the Czech Republic. The second part looks at the position of the Czech Republic in the Chinese media when compared quantitatively in time and with other Visegrad countries and Western European countries. It is argued that due to the extensive and positive coverage of the visit in the Chinese media, the Czech Republic has become the leader in the Central Europe from the media perspective. However, compared to the major Western European countries such as Germany, France, or the UK, the Czech Republic still lags significantly behind when it comes to the amount of coverage in the Chinese media.

Xi Jinping's "Acupuncture Style" Visit to the Czech Republic

On 28 March 2015, Chinese president Xi Jinping embarked on a three-day trip to the Czech Republic. This is the historically first state visit by a Chinese president in the country and also a first Xi Jinping's visit as a president to the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The Chinese media paid a considerable amount of attention to the visit to show that Xi received "the most sincere and friendly welcoming" from the Czech side ("最真诚最友好的接待"), as the Czech president Zeman promised in November 2015.

The dominant state television broadcaster in China CCTV started to cover Xi's visit to the Czech Republic on 24 March, four days ahead of the actual visit. During the following three days, news related to the Czech Republic and Xi's visit were seen intensively on the CCTV.

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For example, CCTV news covered Xi's article published on the Czech Newspaper *Pravo Daily*, introduced the Czech Republic as an EU country with advantageous location and strong industrial background, and broadcasted an interview with the Czech president. In the interview, the Czech president showed off his Chinese language skills by pronouncing Krtek in its Chinese name "Yan Shu" (鼯鼠) and confessed his personal admirations toward Xi.

From 28 March to 30 March, "News Simulcast"(新闻联播), a 30-minute daily news programme shown simultaneously by all local TV stations in mainland China, spent more than 10 minutes every day during prime time to report on Xi's Czech trip in great detail. Besides, the Chinese-Czech co-produced cartoon series *The Panda and Little Mole* was debuted on the CCTV children's channel on 28 March, echoing Xi's landing in the Czech Republic. On 31 March, though Xi was already for the second day in the United States, the CCTV news still reviewed extensively on Xi's Czech trip and commented that the Czech side spoke highly of Xi's visit.

Official state media such as *Xinhua*, *China Daily*, and *the People's Daily* also paid enormous attention to Xi's Czech trip. Special sections on *Xi's Visit to the Czech Republic and the Nuclear Security Summit* were launched on the official webpages of both *Xinhua* and *China Daily*, meaning that every visitor to the webpages would notice the information about the visit. In *Xinhua's* session, articles aiming at familiarizing Chinese people with the Czech culture were found beside the news about Xi's Czech trip. For instance, an article named "*The Czech*" *Around Us* (你我他身边的捷克) introduced Bata, Bohemian crystal, Antonin Dvorak, Franz Kafka, Pavel Nedved, Milan Kundera, ice-hockey, Karlovy Vary, Prague, and Krtek to the Chinese public. Similar content appeared in another article named *How Much Do You Know About The Beautiful Czech Republic?*(这么美的捷克 你到底了解多少?) On *the People's Daily*, a special report called *Prof. Palát's Chinese Dream* (白利德教授的中国梦) introduced Czech Sinologist Doc. Augusting Palát's life and work in China during the 1950s. The author, an

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ethnic Chinese living in the Czech Republic, wrote that she can see Palát's "Chinese heart" from his photographic work ("从他的摄影作品中，我看到了他的中国心").

Nevertheless, some Chinese media did not forget to mention the troubled past of the bilateral relationship. Thus, an editorial by the *Global Times* refers to the ideological preferences as a past guide for Czech foreign policy under the influence of Havel, Prague being a prominent critic of China and an opponent in questions related to Dalai Lama and human rights. According to the article, the current state of the relationship "seems like a dream" compared to the past situation. This sudden turn from "obsession with ideology to dealing with relations with China from the point of economic interest" (从痴迷意识形态改为从国家利益角度设计同中国关系) is a trend visible not only in regards to the Czech Republic. The article thus claims that it is a "basis for everything" for China to maintain its economic growth to achieve friendly relations with other countries. Yet the article by the *Global Times* (with a populist reputation) seems to stand out of the general reporting, which mostly just referred to Czech-Chinese relations being at their "best level ever", skipping any mentions of past misgivings.

Moreover, although filled with positive reports and comments on the Czech Republic and Xi's Czech trip, the Chinese media could not totally turn a blind eye to the fact that a few Chinese national flags in Prague were spattered with ink three days before Xi's visit. Hong Lei, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, commented on the flag issue on 28th March with a firm tone: "the historical visit of Xi will surely advance the friendship between China and the Czech Republic ("历史性的访问必将推进中捷的友好")[...] a small group of vandals tried to disturb Xi's visit and harm the Czech-Chinese relations, but they would not achieve their goal" ("一小撮破坏分子妄图干扰习近平主席这次访问，破坏中捷关系这一图谋不可能得逞").

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Hong's relatively calm reaction shows that compared to the European media's keen interest on the 'flag incident', the Chinese media seem to underplay this issue, with the vocal the *Global Times* being the only exception. An original commentary from the *Global Times* refers to this action from the Czechs as "a gentleman surprisingly spits on a red carpet" ("绅士冷不丁地突然往红地毯上吐了一口痰") and claims that the perpetrators may embarrass the Czech Republic more, even though they meant to disgrace China ("肇事者显然是想让中国方面 '不好看', 但更难看的恐怕是捷克官方"). The commentary further explains that this incident cripples people's view of social governance in Prague and the Czech Republic ("他们挑战的实际上是布拉格的城市管理水平和那个国家不让隆重时刻被一些极端表现打扰的能力"), clearly blaming the lapse on the Czech police.

Xi's visit ended with substantial achievements such as signing business deals allegedly worth \$4 billion in 2016 and up to 10 billion more in upcoming five years. However, it is fair to say that Xi's three-day's stay is even more symbolic than substantial. Through the significant amount of media reports on Xi's Czech trip, Chinese media has delivered the following messages implicitly to the domestic and international audiences. Firstly, the Czech Republic has become an "acupuncture point" ("点穴式"访问) on China's Belt and Road Initiative. Secondly, the favour Czech president Zeman offered by attending the Chinese military parade last September was repaid with much attention and investment from the Chinese side. Last but not least, directed mainly to the Chinese domestic audience, the visit pinpointed that the Chinese president is welcomed with unprecedented ceremony, be it in the UK last October or in the Czech Republic this March.

Czech Republic, the New Sweetheart of China in the EU?

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This part continues with analyzing of how the historical moment in the Sino-Czech relations compares with the past Chinese official media coverage of the Czech Republic and of the coverage of other countries in the region and rest of Europe. Data are retrieved from *the People's Daily Online* (人民网) using search engine *the People's Daily Search* (人民网检索) by searching “title of news” (新闻标题).

The People's Daily is an official newspaper in China established by the Chinese Communist Party in 1946. Ever since its foundation, *the People's Daily* has been under direct control of the Party's top leadership. Due to its strong political-orientation, articles in this newspaper can be regarded as offering authoritative view of the Chinese government. Compared to Xinhua News and other comprehensive Chinese media source, *the People's Daily* has a clear focus on political issues, especially top leaders' state visits and policies of high importance. Thus, data retrieved from *the People's Daily* show political preferences, instead of other less relevant issues such as sports or entertainment. This is exactly why *the People's Daily* has often been used as an indicator of the Chinese higher politics by researchers. A large number of *the People's Daily* articles devoted to a political or geographical region shows that this area's level of significance is rising. In the first three months of 2016, the Czech Republic

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gained the most reports among the Visegrad Four (V4) countries, as shown in the following histogram. This indicates a new foreign policy preference of China in the V4.

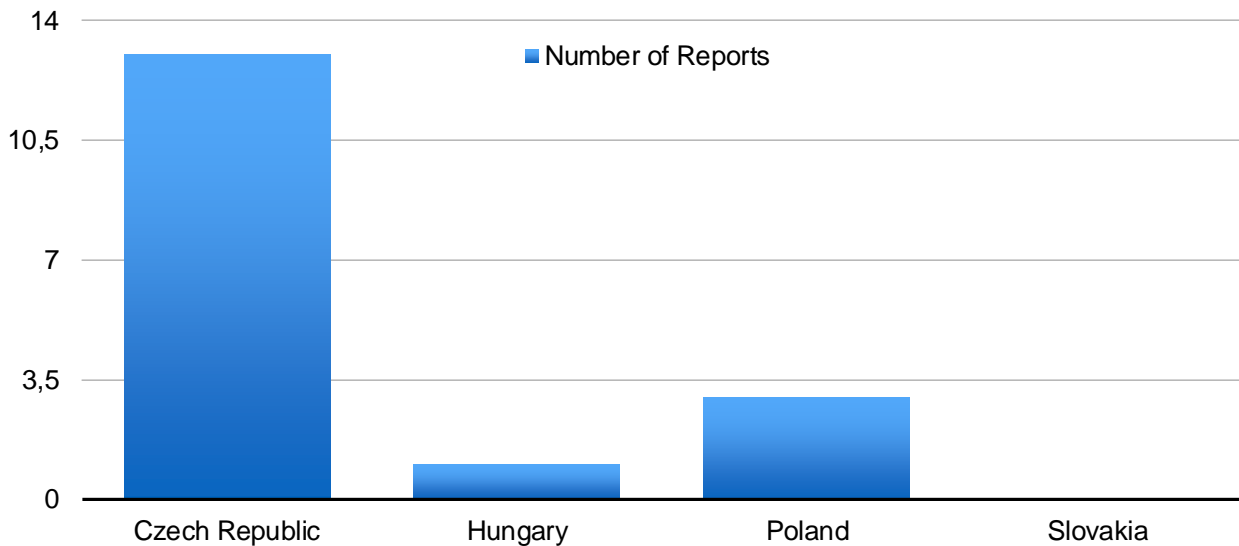


Chart 1. Number of reports on the V4 countries in the first three months of 2016

The change of visibility and prominence in *the People's Daily* also communicates information on a region's power-shift in their relations with China. As shown in the following line graph, a steady rising of Sino-Czech relations has appeared from 2010. In 2010, *the People's Daily* reported most extensively about Poland, followed by reports on Hungary and Slovakia, with the Czech Republic getting the least amount of reports. From 2010 to 2015, news on Poland still occupied the leading position; the number of reports on Hungary experienced dramatic ups and downs and ended with the lowest position in 2015. The number of the pieces of news on Slovakia and the Czech Republic are generally rising, with the Czech ones rising much faster than Slovak. In the first three months of 2016, the Czech Republic apparently became the "new love" of China, with the other three V4 countries lagging far behind. However, it is still too soon to declare the Czech Republic the new "star" of 2016 at this moment, since there are still 9 more months for Poland, the biggest country in V4 who maintains a good relationship with China, to "catch up" and take its leading position back.

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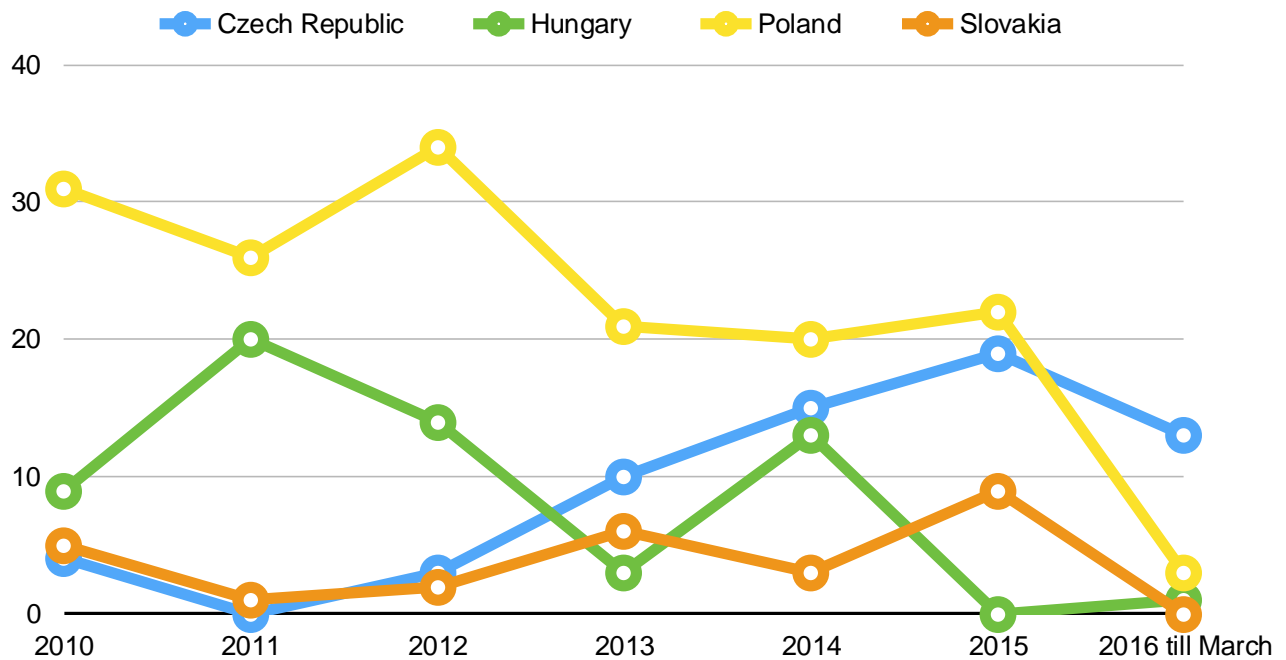


Chart 2. Number of reports on the V4 countries from 2010 to march 2016

Not only that the Czech Republic has gained much more attention in the past few years, also the discourse tone has shifted from a negative-neutral one to a positive-neutral one. From 2010 to 2012, among 17 articles on the Czech Republic, 4 of them (24%) are about problematic Czech political situations (捷克政坛发生地震, 捷克:亲信涉贪 总理宣布辞职, 捷克议会自行解散, 捷克议会提前选举结束). From 2013 to 2016, only 2 out of 47 (4%) reports on the Czech Republic are negative, targeting political and social problems (捷克利益集团助长贪腐之风, 捷克国家博物馆丢失 31 件画作).

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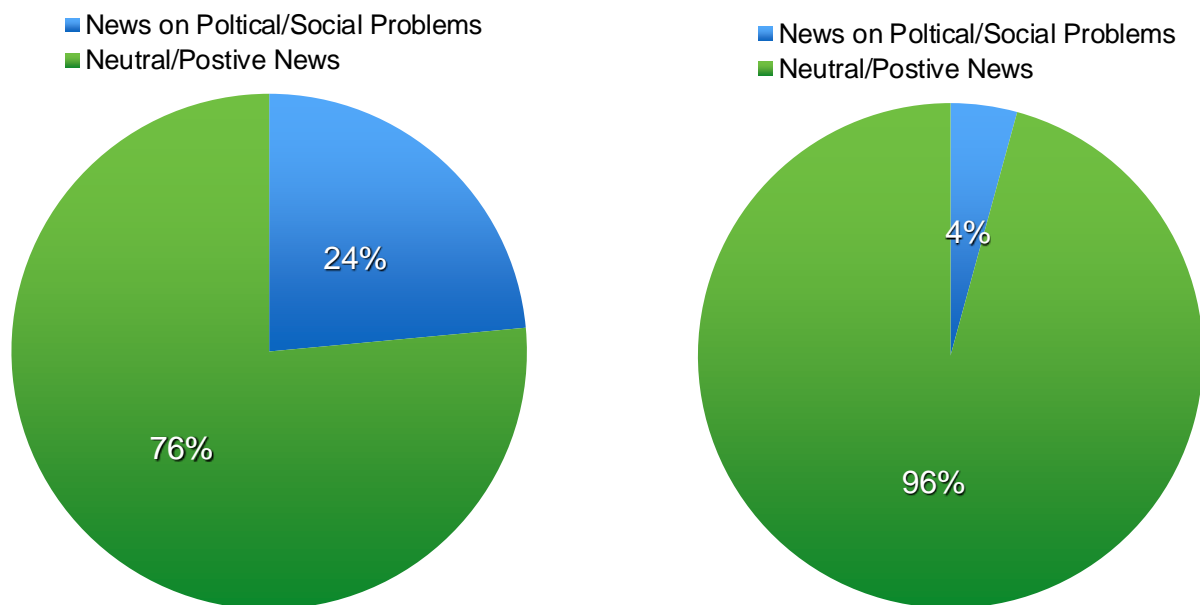


Chart 3 and 4. Percentage of negative-neutral v.s. positive-neutral news on Czech Republic from 2010 to 2012 and from 2013 to March 2016

Then, is it fair to say that the Czech Republic has become the most important partner of China in the whole EU? Data from 2015 to March 2016 from *the People's Daily* cast doubt on this conjecture. Although the number of reports on the Czech Republic in the first three months of 2016 has spurred almost to the level of those of France, this number is still not even half of that of Germany and the UK in the same period. Moreover, in 2015, the Czech-related reports are only around 1/6 of those on the UK, and around 1/5 of those on Germany and France, even though the Czech president Zeman was the only EU president who attended the Chinese military parade in 2015.

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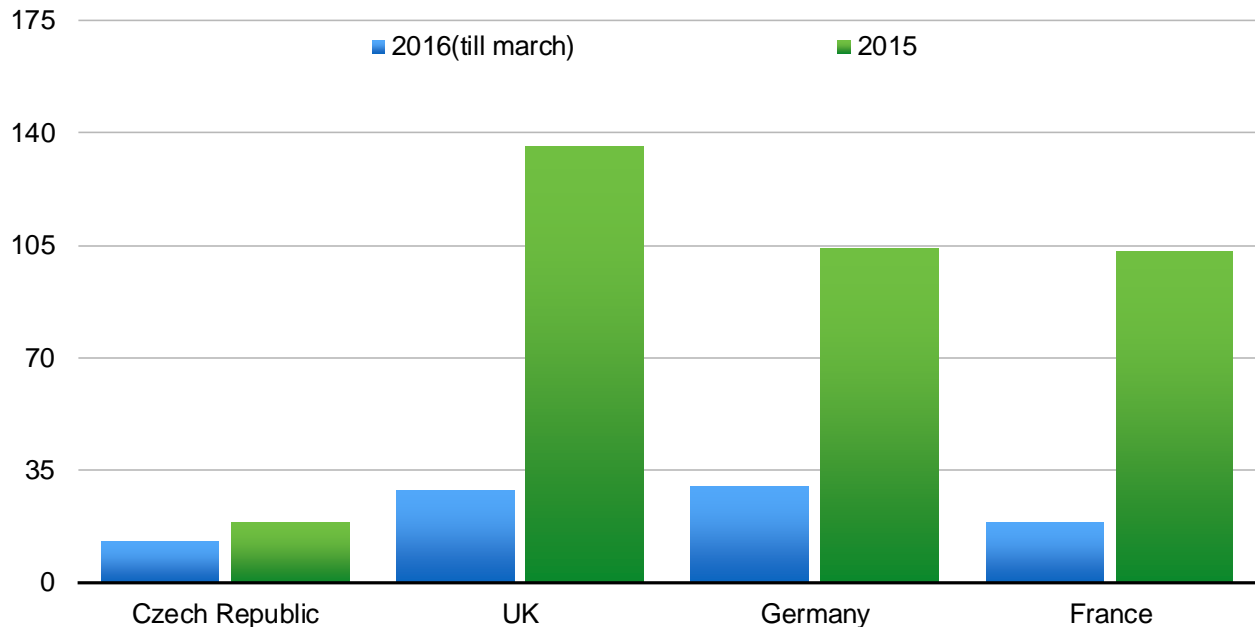


Chart 5. Number of reports on the Czech Republic, UK, Germany and France in 2016 (till March) and 2015

Therefore, even though the Czech Republic might become the “new love” of China in the Central European region, it is unlikely it would take place of the traditionally strong Western European countries in China-EU relations in the short-run.

Conclusion

The Czech Republic is currently experiencing its honeymoon period in the relations with China, which is confirmed by the amount and the positive tone of the reports in the Chinese media. The Czech coverage in the Chinese media has been on rise since 2010 and in early months of 2016 they overtook by large margin the reports on other V4 countries. Obviously, this is mainly due to the Chinese President Xi’s visit to the country, which was covered extensively by the Chinese media. Moreover, this amount of reporting on the Czech Republic

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has been overwhelmingly positive, both when compared to the past and to international media coverage of the visit. The Chinese media paid for example only little attention to the negative aspects of the visit, such as the flag incidents before the visit. It remains to be seen how the position of the Czech Republic would develop in the Chinese media in the future, in particular, whether it would keep its dominant position in the regional context. In any case, it is probably unrealistic to expect that it would, in relative terms, strengthen its position beyond the first three months of the 2016 and attack the position of the major Western European countries.

About the author

Runya Qiaoan is a research fellow at IAS and a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Masaryk University, Czech Republic. Her published papers include a research on Chinese perception of Central and Eastern Europe and a research on collective memories reflected in popular Chinese films and TV series. Before coming to Europe, Runya finished a bachelor degree of philosophy from Sun Yat-sen University in China and worked one year in a Chinese NGO. In the academic year 2015-2016, she did her research at the University of Toronto, Canada. To see her analysis on Chinese media discourse, please check our publications of China Media Watch. Contact: qiaoan@asian.sk