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Cultural rebranding as a challenge for Czech society

“For the first time in the history of man, the planet he inhabits is encompassed by a single civilization. Because of this, anything that happens anywhere has consequences, both good and ill, for everyone everywhere. Many dangerous conflicts in the world today can be explained by the simple fact that the closer we are to each other, the more we notice our differences. All of this makes the modern world an especially dramatic place, with so many peoples in so many places resisting coexistence with each another. And yet its only chance for survival is precisely such coexistence.” (Václav Havel: World Theatre Day Message, 1994)

Taking positions on the Central European scene

The Czech Republic is a country of two post prefixes. Like the majority of Central European countries, it belongs to the group of post-communist countries and like in the rest of East European countries, the disappearance of the Iron Curtain was compensated by new borders, which were politically and culturally important as well, and caused for instance that Ukraine did not border the Czech Republic anymore. In 1993, the dissolution of the state we shared with Slovaks moved us more to the West, yet it has been really difficult for us to find our identity or a name in the new position. Czech society was forced to use its archaic name, which does not sound very natural even nowadays: “Česko/ Czechia”,¹ whose name can be traced back to the

times of National Revival in the late 18th century, however, it is more post-Czechoslovakia than Slovakia with its positive expectation, vitality and creativity² when founding a new state. Unlike Slovaks, we, as those, who represented “what was left from Czechoslovakia”, were not forced to reformulate our new identity so radically even when the Czech Republic joined the EU because “whereas European integration is a historically unique opportunity for the Slovaks and mainly for the Poles to geopolitically and economically attach to the West, the Czechs perceived their accession to the European Union as a return somewhere they think they naturally belong from the historical interwar democratic period, which was economically successful.”³

Paradoxes and absurd situations are as common in the Czech Republic as in the whole Central European region. Constantly changing borders and answers to the so-called Czech Question⁴ swing our adherence between Russia and Germany, or the East and the West, according to the current political climate. After the Yalta Conference, Central Europe, which Milan Kundera defined as maximal cultural diversity in minimum space, was ‘hijacked’ to the Soviet zone and existed as a demonstration of spiritual resistance more than ever before.⁵ Prague still lies west of Vienna as it did before 1989. Having in mind our traditions, official Czech politics still considers Hungary to be a neighbour⁶ and the role of Slovakia as a new

1 The term “Czechia” was rejected by CzechTourism: “Native speakers told us to forget about using ‘Czechia’ because nobody knows it and everybody would confuse it with Chechnya.”

(<http://zpravy.ihned.cz/c1-56401510-czechia-czech-lands-nebo-cr-vypadame-jak-bananova-republika-tvrdi-odbornik>).

2 See article by Zora Jaurová. (35-42 p.)

3 Ehl, Martin: *What does Europeanism mean for the U4 countries?* [Co znamená evropanství pro země Visegradské čtyřky] in Bútora, Martin – Mesežnikov, Grigorij – Bútorová, Zora – Kollár, Miroslav: *From Where and Where to?, Twenty Years of Independence [Odkiaľ a kam, Dvadsať rokov samostatnosti]*, p. 188. It is not only a hint to one of crucial works by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, first published in 1895, which speaks about the position of Czech and Slovaks in Austria-Hungary as well as discussions about the meaning of Czech history in general.

- 4 It is not only a hint to one of crucial works by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, first published in 1895, which speaks about the position of Czech and Slovaks in Austria-Hungary as well as discussions about the meaning of Czech history in general.
- 5 See Milan Kundera's essay *The Stolen West or The Tragedy of Central Europe*.
- 6 See *The Report on the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic with the paragraph dedicated to Hungary in the chapter "Neighbours"*, 2011, p. 16.
- 7 Kopeček, Michal: *Politics, Antipolitics, and Czechs in Central Europe: The Idea of „Visegrad Cooperation“ and Its Reflection in Czech Politics in the 1990s*, Questionnaires Returns, ed. A. Bove, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conference, Vol. 12, 2002, p. 4
- 8 See the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, <http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni.vztahy/multilateralni.spoluprace/visegrad/index.html>.

foreign country is quite unnatural for the majority of Czechs. Havel's apolitical politics initiated the so-called Visegrad Group, which was established in 1990, using the message to "play up the specific cultural identity of Central Europe as distinct from Eastern Europe, especially the Soviet Union",⁷ yet it had to primarily solve political challenges like repatriation of Soviet soldiers from Central Europe and integration of the region in European structures.

Cooperation of the V4 countries is still a priority of Czech foreign policy in the field of multilateral cooperation and "it has become the most clearly profiled initiative in the Central European region. The Visegrad Group has a good reputation as a catalyst of integration processes, the only pragmatically operating form of multilateral cooperation in the region as well as a symbol of stability in Central Europe (compared with unstable Balkan, for instance)."⁸ The only stable organization structure of the group is the International Visegrad Fund (<http://visegradfund.org>) established in 2000 "with the purpose to facilitate the development of cultural cooperation, scientific exchanges, research and cooperation in the field of education, youth exchange and the development of cross-border cooperation." The political consensus regarding the cooperation in the above-mentioned fields is demonstrated by growing funds allotted to projects and new programs of regional cooperation with Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries. The winning field concerning the number of supported projects is cultural cooperation, which proves its high importance for the identity of the region.

From the Winter's Tale to post-dramatic Bohemia

The Czech nation is small like most Central European nations. Therefore it is interesting to

find out what national stereotypes originate in self-reflection. Our small republic is often divided into the Czech west and the Moravian east regions when speaking about identity. Whereas the western part is enclosed by the German border and defined by Czech beer and goulash, industrial and urban as well as atheistic culture, the (south-)eastern part benefits from the more distinctive neighbourhood of Poland, Slovakia and Austria and it is traditionally perceived as an agricultural and more religious part dedicated to grapevine and Moravian smoked meat. All exceptions, like highly industrialized Moravian Silesia, are accepted in this generalization. We would probably agree with Slovaks, with whom we shared one state for almost the entire 20th century, on myths of a peaceful pigeon nation, bohemian plebeianism and a fatal influence of more powerful entities on existence of the state as such. We and other Central European nations share the awareness of cultural togetherness through personalities, who freely fluctuate in the Central European space (art history including the significant tinge of Jewish culture is a great example), and political-historical discontinuities represented by a mutual stigma of 20th century totalitarian regimes and a chaotic transformation after revolutionary "year zero" in the states of the former socialistic bloc as well as history of this politically unstable region. However, it is a matter of the corresponding community, what narrative it is going to create having in mind geographical, historical and cultural facts.

In the Czech Republic, we use to say "small is beautiful". Are "little Czechs" beautiful even if they give excuses using their small-mindedness to titanic heroism, which is very unfamiliar with Czech nature? In his book *The little Czech and the great Czech nation: national identity and the post-communist transformation*

of society, Ladislav Holý describes Czech small-mindedness: “The little Czech is not motivated by great ideals. The world he lives in is limited by a family, work and close friends and he is cautious and suspicious of everything, which lies outside this world. His opinions are shallow and he is definitely not a hero: this is why the good soldier Švejk is so popular... The Czech nation survived three centuries of oppression due to little Czech people, which created the nation, not heroes... A little Czech... is a social role model, therefore it is important to lack individuality.”⁹ Miniaturisation, liquid identity and a conspiratorial strategy of resistance against suppressing powers resulting in Kafkaesque mysteriousness are demonstrated in the nationwide popularity of fairy-tales or puppet theatre with typical Czech characters: a devil, Death and brash and coward swagger Kasperle. Except for the above-mentioned “myths about Czech national nature”, these formats show a specific mixture of Czech humour, irony and melancholy.

The genesis of the long-term project of the Arts and Theatre Institute PACE.V4 (Performing Arts Central Europe – Visegrad Countries Focus) seems to be postdramatically non-linear in the context of nonexistent branding strategy of the Czech Republic. PACE.V4 aims at creating a common strategy of promotion of contemporary performing arts of the countries in the Visegrad group or similar projects in cooperation with other Central European countries. Research has accompanied activities realized within the network of cultural institutions and organizations from the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary like presentation of contemporary theatre, dance and music at significant international platforms.

20 Research is necessary for content – or, simply

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said, one of the “by-products” is development of mutual awareness of participants and colleagues of the network, which is not on the anticipated level despite Central European analogies, intersections, traditions and stories, although the International Festival Theatre in Plzeň regularly presents contemporary drama of the Visegrad countries and magazines *Svět a divadlo/World and Theatre* or *Taneční zóna/Dance Zone* provide us with periodical reflection. Czechoslovak projects in coproduction originate especially in the field of dance physical theatre and several Czech directors are engaged in Polish puppet theatre. However, we have less information about contemporary Hungarian or Slovenian theatre and contemporary Visegrad drama. On the contrary, drama of the German-speaking countries is continually and systematically introduced, reflected and integrated in the Czech Republic in a greater extent – especially due to the Prague Theatre Festival of German Language, which has been organised since 1996.

The logo of the network (108 pages) corresponds with the mentioned content of the PACE.V4 project with quadrangles representing four cooperating states in white, red, blue and green, i.e. colours of the national flags of the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. Squares are clustered in a variable mosaic,¹⁰ which is assembled in various shapes, borders and territories of activities and reminds us of a figure symbolizing a human body, which is inseparable from various forms of performing arts and intercultural dialogue of the project. The project of the international cooperation PACE.V4 was initiated by the Arts and Theatre Institute in 2012. It was the time when first materials for the branding strategy of the Czech Republic came into existence” in the “Identity” stream for the research project

9 Holý, L.: *The little Czech and the great Czech nation: national identity and the post-communist transformation of society*. Prague, 2001, p. 62.

10 See the trailer of the PACE.V4 project, <http://www.theatre.cz/performing-central-europe>.

11 The project Czech Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping was launched in 2011. The aim of the project is to get complete quantitative and qualitative information about the state of branches of cultural and creative industries in the Czech Republic and a subsequent analysis of these data and findings. Creative industries bear a lot of negative aspects speaking about cultural globalisation and this is why the project also deals with the issues of Czech national identity and the status of Czech culture in the globalized world. In this context, round-table discussions are held.

Czech Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping. Nevertheless, intersections are more important than chronology. In May 2013, a round table with the topic Branding of Czech Culture in the Context of the V4 Group and Central Europe took place. Experts from various fields and institutions accepted the invitation and discussed three topics:

- “Visegrad” and “Central Europe” versus disciplines of art in the Czech Republic
- project / brand “Visegrad” and cultural policy
- cultural mobility.

The objective of the first part of the discussion was to identify strong and weak disciplines of Czech art in Central Europe, present cooperation among artists in specific disciplines in this region and a position of Czech artists at the regional art market. The result was recommendations about which disciplines and forms should cooperate within the region (it can be a bilateral or trilateral cooperation).

Although we heard a radically critical opinion that no contemporary Czech art discipline is really strong, the majority of participants agreed that film and music are the strongest disciplines in contemporary Czech art speaking about both regional and world contexts. Both of them draw from the tradition (the so-called Golden Sixties of Czech film and classical music) and contemporary production in the field of Czech documentary film, jazz and folk music and activities of chamber orchestras.

Design is considered to be a discipline with a great potential, which suffers from non-existent institutional support and bad marketing or ineffective interconnection of authors and Czech companies. We speak especially about product design, traditional Czech glass and to a lesser extent about graphic design.

Visual arts and literature are perceived as weaker disciplines because of weak marketing, the language barrier and the lack of continual support of translation or absence of personalities with international overlap.

Theatre was split into strong disciplines like

traditional Czech puppetry and Czech contemporary dance as a young and internationally open discipline, or smaller companies of so-called experimental theatre, which are usually very active in the field of international cooperation. Weaker theatre discipline in this context is drama including contemporary drama.

Speaking about Visegrad cooperation, experts from various disciplines perceived it very differently. Common branding is rejected in some fields, like in classical music because of an existing strong brand or in literature due to the language barrier.

However, in experimental, physical and dance theatre, regional cooperation exists as an important element and example for Eastern Europe where there is no financial support tool for international art production, which would be similar to the International Visegrad Fund. Moreover, mostly independent companies, which form small communities, operate in this field and common branding can help them perform a breakthrough in strong international competition.

Other important phenomena are showcases and festivals with participating artists and artworks from the Visegrad countries, although the Visegrad brand is not accented very much in these cases. They are various theatre and music festivals as well as projects of the Institute of Documentary Film called East European Forum (the major meeting of Central and Eastern European documentary makers and leading European and North American producers and distributors), Ex Oriente Film (the international workshop of documentary film, which supports its development and funding in the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe) and an online videotheque *East Silver*. The international showcase Designblock in Prague or the Brno Biennial rank among the top events in the context of Central Europe and they have great reputation in the whole world.

The second part of the discussion was dedicated to the brand/project Visegrad and questions like: Is contemporary art still a link to the Central European

region? How can art (co)create and strengthen identity of Visegrad countries in the international context? In the discussion, we focused on the contemporary state of the Visegrad Group project and cooperation within the V4 Group in the field of art and culture. Its result should be recommendations for common cultural policy of the Visegrad Group and its tools.

The main thesis that was generally agreed on was dysfunctionality of the “Visegrad brand”. The recommendation regarding promotion and branding was work with the concept of Central Europe with the accent on the link between tradition and innovation. The main objective against the Visegrad brand was unnaturalness (unlike cross-border bilateral or trilateral cooperation) and the lack of content or unambiguous “Visegrad specifications” compared with the concept of the Czech-German Future Fund.¹²

It is true that we heard opinions with the trace of persisting fears or resistance to cooperation with Austria and Germany having in mind Czech historical experience. Common branding strategy and promotion of Scandinavian countries was also mentioned and it can be inspiring for Visegrad cooperation only into certain extent because Nordic countries show much smaller cultural differences than the Visegrad countries.

There was an interesting remark about Prague, which Czechs consider to be the heart of Europe. Whereas the capital city of the Czech Republic is partially set aside due to its geographical distance from the Central European context, the Moravian metropolis Brno has much better conditions. The triangle of Vienna – Bratislava – Budapest was mentioned as well because the cities are connected with the phenomenon of Danube with a natural

functional international exchange in the field of culture and education and with natural integration of the ‘German element’.

The result of the above-mentioned discussion was that the meaning of the Visegrad cooperation should not be the ambition to unite this cultural space but to create a platform for meeting people and cultures and last, but not least, to use it within common presentations.

A strong tradition in connection with the emphasis on growing innovative “small” disciplines with strong pro-international orientation (dance, design, documentary film) should become the Visegrad specific.

The positive recommendation from the participating experts went to cooperation within festivals (circulation of artworks and artists), common showcases (theatre, film, design), big coproduction exhibitions, support of curator trips, educational programs, already-existing projects (mostly avoiding of support of artificial interconnection) and projects, which have a new point of view of the past.

The last part of the meeting was dedicated to the issue of mobility. At the beginning, we heard a slightly provocative question, whether Czech art actually needs mobility and what it brings to our country. We focused on tools for common branding and interconnections of brands Visegrad and/or Central Europe with Czech cultural policy. The result of the discussion should be recommendations for export of Czech art and international cooperation regarding branding of Czech art as a part of cultural context in Central Europe.

At this point (and we must say that it was based on previous discussions organized within the project Czech Cultural and Creative Industries Mapping), the discussion completely avoided the topic of art mobility in general, which

12 The mission of the Czech-German Future Fund is: “The CGFF helps built bridges between Czechs and Germans and purposefully supports projects, which bring together people of both countries, which allow and deepen insights to their worlds, common culture and history.” The support of the CGFF does not aim only at cultural, scientific, publication and social projects, scholarship programs, youth projects, restoration of sights and support of municipalities as well as compensation for victims of national socialist violence, i.e. prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps, jails and other prisons and those, who were hiding from persecution in inhuman conditions. See more at www.fondbudoucnosti.cz.

is considered to be an indisputable contribution for Czech society, and emphasized the criticism of the situation in the Czech Republic. It concerned the lack of concept of the state in the field of export strategy, dramaturgic vision and synergy among public administration institutions, and support of art in general. Last, but not least, there is a lack of support of art from private funds (including tax assignments like in Slovakia). The participants also mentioned the missing or insufficient evaluation of support in these fields on national and regional levels.

The above course of the round table naturally brought a partial point of view of the Czech culture branding issue in the context of the V4 Group and Central Europe and we need to understand it as one fragment of the long-term process with representation of a wider opinion spectre from various art and sociologic fields and humanities. However, it was a confirmation of some premises that were present at the beginning of the PACE.V4 project:

- increase of visibility of performing arts of the V4 countries;
- enrichment of art and cultural production of the V4 countries through international cooperation;
- support of performing arts export from the V4 region;
- better conditions for negotiating the participation of the V4 countries at priority performing arts events;
- financial and organizational synergy when realising commonpresentation of performing arts in V4 countries;
- higher competitiveness of the cultural offer of the V4 countries with cultures of big countries including positive impacts on competitiveness and economics of V4 countries;

- presentation and support of cultural diversity of the V4 region and Central Europe;
- synergy and cooperation with other European countries; and,
- culture and live art with the main accent on performing arts as an integral part of the creative process of good reputation of the V4 countries and image of the whole region abroad.

We validate their force not only within project activities in the field of theatre and dance but also on the basis of debates with colleagues from other disciplines. The most serious statement of the round-table with experts was the lack of self-confidence, insufficient support and insufficient state policy in the field of culture, which naturally lead to low awareness and minimum interest in local (cultural) events. But it is cultural diplomacy and regional cooperation when promoting one's concerns and influencing one's reputation that can be the main tool of efficient foreign policy of smaller countries.

To brand or not to brand?

The term nation branding did not emerge in the field of culture. Its origin is closely connected with political sciences, mostly with public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, which is its integral part. Joseph S. Nye implements the term 'soft power' when analysing tools and strategies of cultural diplomacy: "The soft power of a country rests heavily on three basic resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when others see them as legitimate and having moral authority). The parenthetical conditions are the key in determining whether political soft power resources translate into the behaviour of attraction that can influence

others toward favourable outcomes.”¹³ The important thing is that culture is listed on the first place in this definition. Soft power as a tool for foreign policy is not anything new in the 21st century¹⁴, we can trace its use in history. It depends on trustworthiness of governments and represents a bilateral dialogue (in Nye’s words: “soft power is a dance that requires partners”¹⁵). Its opposite is manipulative propaganda.

An image of a certain country and nation depends on culture, political values and foreign policy. Its evaluation can take place by measuring the power of a brand. “The term ‘nation branding’ was first coined by Simon Anholt in the 1990s and refers to the application of marketing strategies to individual countries. The aim is to create and promote a distinct self-image and international reputation that will most effectively serve nation’s interests. The tactic has become especially important for countries aiming to carve out particular niches for themselves in the international system as global markets continue to expand and international competition for trade, investment, and tourism intensifies. The field remains one of the most controversial arenas of public diplomacy, but the growing interest in the power and potential of nation branding suggests that its presence and legitimacy will only continue to grow in the coming years.”¹⁶

Although the term nation branding is derived from the field of international relations, diplomacy and marketing strategies and it is closely connected with economic and political interests of specific countries, Anholt brings more general arguments for systematic and continual work with country’s image: “Not every government, and indeed not every population, treats international approval as an important goal in its own right; but when we speak of

the images of places, we are talking about something more significant than mere popularity. The only sort of government that can afford to ignore the impact of its national reputation is one that has no interest in participating in the global community, and no desire for its economy, its culture or its citizens to benefit from the influences and opportunities that the rest of the world offers them. It is the duty of every responsible government in the age of globalisation to recognise that the nation’s reputation, one of the most valuable assets of its people, is given to it in trust for the duration of its period in office. Its duty is to hand that reputation down to its successors, whatever their political persuasion, in at least as good health as it received it, and to improve it if possible for the benefit of future generations.”¹⁷ What relation does culture have to country’s image? The Anholt Hegaxon proves its integral incorporation in theories of public diplomacy, nation or place branding and competitive identity.

Anholt and the American GfK Company developed the so-called *Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index*SM for analytical measuring of national brands. It has been a “barometer of global meaning” since 2008 and it measures image of 50 nations in the world every year. The analytical chart is based on a questionnaire from 20,000 people of 18 years of age and above from 20 panel countries¹⁸. The index describes strength and attractiveness of a brand and image based on six criteria: export, governance, culture, people, tourism, investment & immigration¹⁹. The survey regarding culture concerns the following aspects: “Cultural aspects measured are perceptions of a country’s heritage, its contemporary cultural ‘vibes’ from music, films, art and literature,

13 Nye, Joseph S.: *The Future of Power*, New York, 2011, p. 84.

14 Although Nye speaks about so-called “smart power” in connection with the shift of power in the 21st century, between traditional superpowers and other states and in direction from the national state to non-governmental parties.

15 *Ibid.*

16 See http://publicdiplomacy.wikia.com/wiki/Nation_Branding

17 Anholt, Simon: *Engagement. Public Diplomacy in a Globalised World*. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2008, p. 43.

18 The core 20 panel countries are: Western Europe/North America: U.S., Canada, the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden; Central and Eastern Europe: Russia, Poland, Turkey; Asia-Pacific: Japan, China, India, South Korea, Australia; Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico; Middle East/Africa: Egypt, South Africa

19 See more about methodology at

http://www.gtai.de/GTAI/Content/CN/Invest/_SharedDocs/Downloads/Studies/diw-wochenbericht-9-2010.pdf.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Simon Anholt: *The Czech Republic is not running shoes [Česká republika není běžecká obuv]*, 2011, <http://www.mistojakoznacka.cz/temata/simon-anholt-ceska-republika-neni-bezecka-obuv/>.

22 Van Ham, Peter: 'Place Branding – The State of the Art', *Annals of the American Academy*, p. 12. In his study, Van Ham speaks about the rise of so-called 'competition state', which is changing to a quasi-enterprise association in contemporary economic conditions: "The emerging dominance of the competition state certainly undermines the achievement of the communal goals that have constituted the *raison d'être* of the (European) state since the late nineteenth century. The Western competition state now values efficiency over equity; it merits competitiveness over

as well as the country's excellence in sports. Various cultural activities are presented to respondents to gauge their strongest images of a country's cultural 'product.'²⁰

Arguments, which prove the involvement of culture in the economic growth especially in connection with its support from public funds, are overruling contemplations about culture from the point of view of humanities. At the time when representation, postmodern philosophy and growing multiculturalism are in crisis and it is more difficult to reach a consensus about generally shared values except for the economic ones, it is a logical development. A discourse regarding branding of nations, countries, cities and places also includes opposition voices, which express objections, that this type of strategies supports stereotypes in perception of nations and cultures and it is a demonstration of neo-colonialist domination of American culture. Even Anholt, as a 'guru' of national brands, claims that nation branding is not a panacea: "I said that a nation image is essential but I did not say that you can provide a country with a brand like you do with a mobile phone or a bank. I have never seen a single case in 20 years, which proves that country's reputation can be changed through marketing communication... If a country succeeds in improving its image, it is because what is going on in the country, not because of what a country says... When nation's image really changes, it is all about management, society, culture, politics, economics and timing... nations must deserve their reputation very slowly and patiently through their policies, investments, innovations, people, culture, society, tourism and especially contribution for mankind."²¹

If we examine the image of Central European countries, it seems that the situation

for all European countries is aggravated by the fact that the European Union is considered to be a top brand, which actually competes with other 25 national European brands and the content is naturally adjusted: "The EU's Constitution... illustrates that the Union hesitates to formulate clear-cut 'European interests'. Instead, the EU prides itself for the normative foundations of its foreign policy. The EU promulgates and defends its basic principles (like peace, democracy, and the rule of law), ideas (sustainable development and the social market economy), and norms (good governance and institution-building). The Constitution summarises the EU's global mission as a fighter for and contributor to 'peace, security, the sustainable development of the earth, eradication of poverty and protection of human rights and in particular children's rights, as well as the strict observance and development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.'²²

In the results using the method of Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands IndexSM in 2009²³, the Czech Republic can be found in the chapter Central/Eastern Europe with other Central European countries like Poland and Hungary (Austria belongs to Western Europe, Slovakia was not evaluated). The evaluation countries from Central/Eastern Europe are Poland, Russia and Turkey (sic!). In 2009, there was not any Central European country in the "Top Twenty", however, it is interesting that Germany ended up on the third place. The first place went to the USA, the 'silver medal' went to France (the first place in the culture category as one of six categories for evaluation). It is good news that the Czech Republic and Hungary were at least taken into consideration in this 'club' of evaluated countries and the role of Poland as an evaluator tells a lot about

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the perception of its geopolitical role in the region of Central and Eastern Europe.

Except for Anholt Index, London-based Brand Finance deals with evaluation of nation brands as well. The BSI index, developed by this company, works with a different methodology of brand evaluation “of infrastructure & efficiency, brand equity, and economic performance. These categories are each worth 33% of the overall BSI. The BSI is based on factors such as the quality of a country’s workforce and ability to attract foreign talent, perceptions of its quality of life, and its projected GDP growth. Brand Finance uses a combination of government statistics, consensus forecasts, and analyst projections to quantify these variables and create an overall brand rating.”²⁴ Although the methodology of evaluation does not include the category of culture as such, some results from 2011 and 2012 bring interesting findings regarding Central and East European countries about branding of countries in their region.

The third fastest growing brand out of one hundred nation brands was Estonia in 2011 for the following reasons: technologically developed society with low taxes and a high level of justice strengthened its brand also due to rebranding to a Nordic country, which is singled out from the Baltic region associated with Belorussia. Croatia, the ninth fastest growing brand of 2011, strengthened its position due to its distance from problematic Balkan neighbours and the effort to profile as an Adriatic state connected to Central and West European countries.

In 2012, the only East European country, which made it to the “Top 20 Nation Brands”, was Poland (the last 20th place) as the fastest growing brand of 2012. The good result was achieved mostly due to performance of Polish economics but positive impact of the European

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Football Championship²⁵ is mentioned as well. The Czech Republic occupied the 7th place in the chart of the fastest growing brands; Ukraine (2nd place) and Romania (10th place) rank among the Central and East European countries that scored.

Although we can raise a lot of questions about the aforementioned methodologies concerning objectivity (the selection of evaluators, evaluation etc.), there are two factors, which are important for reputation of a country on the level of a global international community. Synergy of public, private and civil sectors is essential as well as interconnection of economic, political and cultural indicators when improving national image as it results from a complex evaluation represented by the Anholt Index. The development of the BSI Index shows the importance of regional branding for reputation of countries involved. Both factors can be inspiring starting points for branding strategy of the Czech Republic.

Czech Republic: The land of cultural heritage without present stories

The topic of branding is new in the Czech Republic and it is a matter of theoretical-academic circles rather than practical implementation. As the *Export Strategy of the Czech Republic for 2012–2020*, elaborated by the Ministry of Industry and Trade in 2012, says: “the result of consultations realized during the preparation of this strategy is that marketing and branding of the Czech Republic and Czech brands abroad as well as lobbying for Czech economic concerns are perceived by exporters as two of the weakest pro-export state services. Czech exporters have experienced low activity of Czech representatives when competitors of Czech companies get full support of their home country and this weakens Czech global

solidarity. By doing so, it utilizes the universal discourse of commerce, which now more than ever dominates the public sphere,” p. 6.

²³ Data from the following years are not available.

²⁴ BrandFinance® Nation Brands 100, 2009, p. 49.

²⁵ This could be also a factor of success of Ukraine as the co-organiser of the championship, see further.

competitiveness.” It is typical that this document does not count with participation of the Ministry of Culture when suggesting measures how to strengthen marketing, economic and business diplomacy and establish or maintain the network of Czech fans abroad; this contradicts the above-mentioned methods leading to better image or stronger country brand.

Let us briefly look at documents of institutions of public administration, which are supposed to promote Czech culture abroad or create image of the Czech Republic abroad (with help of culture).

A new strategic document by Czech Centres reacts to reproaches about minimum synergy among institutions of public administration in the field of support of Czech art and its promotion abroad. The priority for 2012 – 2015 is “enhancing the positive image and perceptions of the Czech Republic abroad”,²⁶ which should be achieved by cooperation of various subjects and organizations, specific topics of presentations, involvement of Czech exporters, enhancing internal functionality of the Czech Centres network and cooperation among embassies and other organizations in state administration like Czech Tourism (Ministry for Regional Development), Czech Trade and Czech Invest (Ministry of Industry and Trade) and organizations administrated by the Ministry of Culture (e.g. the Arts and Theatre Institute). The strategy also promises to raise the number of live art events in programs of Czech Centres.

Whereas the document by Czech Centres is dedicated mainly to tools of foreign presentation of the Czech Republic and it leaves out specific features of contemporary Czech art or its regional context for now, other organizations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are more specific in this point. Czech Invest – the investment

and business development agency – mentions Czech highlights like Václav Havel, legendary tennis players and top quality of ice hockey. It considers “commitment, competence and competitiveness” as well as high intellectual capital to be the main qualities of Czech business environment. Czech Trade agency, whose main mission is the support of the growth export by Czech companies, emphasizes reliability of Czech business partners and suppliers, a strategic geographic position of the Czech Republic, a long-term industrial tradition, reasonable prices, developed infrastructure and experienced workforce. The chapter Life in the Czech Republic, published on the website of the Czech Invest, is quite interesting as it lists the following qualities: “relaxation and peace of mind, glorious countryside crisscrossed with thousands of kilometres of hiking tracks, an incredible number of cultural sites, picturesque historical towns, renowned spas”. Modern sport centres including golf courses contribute to high quality of life in the Czech Republic together with cinemas, theatres, concert halls as well as Czech cuisine and beer.

“Czech Republic – Land of Stories”: this is the main motto of Czech Tourism, which highlights the following advantages of the Czech Republic: “ancient towns reflecting the rich history of Central Europe in the past millennium, stone castles and ruins on rocks, splendid chateaux surrounded by fancy parks, noble religious monuments, folk architecture and traditions, museums, galleries, music events, cultural festivals, cosmopolitan Prague” and others.

European Quartet – One Melody, a unique example of regional cooperation, is the project of Visegrad countries where Czech Tourism plays the role of a co-organizer. It offers common

26 Strategy of the Czech Centres 2012–2015 [Strategie činnosti Českých center 2012–2015], <http://www.czechcentres.cz/o-nas/>.

promotion materials and itineraries with Visegrad monuments enrolled in UNESCO, spa towns or places for active holidays and this year, it organizes the first common Visegrad countries roadshow in several states of Latin America.²⁷ We can trace a clear tendency towards emphasizing the tradition and history of the Czech Republic through cultural heritage. Contemporary “stories” from everyday life in the Czech Republic are still missing. In comparison with Slovakia, we brand “hardware” despite the fact that comparable “software” is available. Unfortunately, support of its creation and conditions for operation including its integration in international promotion is not perfect. Is it the fault of state cultural policy?

The currently valid documents of the Ministry of Culture, i.e. *State Cultural Policy 2009–2014*, emphasise general values such as openness, diversity, creativity and freedom of creation. An important declaration of the minister of culture²⁸ in his introduction is that “culture does not spend money but it earns it.”²⁹ The main objectives of cultural policy are: 1. economic and social dimension, 2. civil dimension – the development of personality, 3. the role of the state, regions and municipalities and support and maintenance of cultural values, and 4. the role of the state when making rules. The role of culture in relation to enforcement of foreign-political concerns of the Czech Republic is mentioned at the first point.

Information about development tendencies in culture are listed in the chapter entitled *Background study for State Cultural Policy 2009–2014*. The authors³⁰ speak about the SWOT analysis of the development of Czech cultural environment with strengths like the ways of funding and economic support, activities and improving infrastructure of cultural organizations, information and

communication technologies, cooperation with the non-profit sector and other organizations and institutions as well as an existing institutions of education. The lack of funds in all ways and disciplines and on all levels (the request in the document about “setting the proportion between support and protection of cultural heritage and live art as a condition for a better use of cultural heritage and its multiplication”³¹), a spectre of cultural activities, work with the public and cultural management rank among the weaknesses. Only the point “Opportunities” mentions a geographical location and the possibilities of cooperation with other subject in connection with the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU.³²

The concept of presentation abroad is emphasized in the document *Update of the State Cultural Policy for 2013–2013 with Outlook for 2015–2020* especially in the point “Enhancing the role of culture in external relations policy and enforcing business concerns abroad” with the main tasks of creating foreign cultural policy of the Ministry of Culture, participation of the Czech Republic in important international art markets, exhibitions etc., projection of the needs of foreign cultural policy in the state budget proposal (growth of export), coordination of the preparation of specific projects with the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other points of the updated comment in the fields of interdepartmental cooperation are: “Art and culture as a part of presentation of the Czech Republic at world exhibition and other forums, which are not exclusively of cultural nature” and “Improvement of the system of cultural parties and contents through Czech Centres abroad”.

The final version of the Concept of more effective operation of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic in relation to foreign

²⁷ See www.european-quartet.com for more information.

²⁸ Václav Jehlička at that time.

²⁹ National Cultural Policy 2009–2014 [Státní kulturní politika na léta 2009–2014], amended in 2008, p. 4.

³⁰ The Department of Theory and Culture, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, Charles University Prague in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 46–50.

countries for 2013–2018 was amended recently (July 2013). The main aims are creating and enhancing the positive image of the Czech Republic abroad, cultural awareness and education capacity of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic when learning about cultural heritage of other countries with its presentation in the Czech Republic (with the emphasis on its influence when suppressing tendencies for xenophobia and racism), preservation and support of cultural differences, enhancing international awareness of common roots of preserved cultural heritage, maintaining and enhancing favourable conditions of international cooperation in the field of cultural and creative industries, support of export of Czech culture as a tool for establishing, enhancing and expanding international political relations of the Czech Republic and reaching general aims of Czech foreign policy as well as opening doors for Czech economic export; presentation of Czech cultural heritage abroad for enhancing motivation of tourist visit rate of the Czech Republic and support of enforcing the objectives and strategic concerns of Czech foreign policy through the tools of cultural diplomacy.

The priorities of Czech foreign cultural policy are the development of bilateral cultural exchange and common projects with neighbouring states and European cultural powers as well as contribution to an intercultural dialogue between Central and South-East Europe where the cooperation of the Visegrad Group rank among the priorities.

As we can see from the contents and date of the aforementioned documents, nation branding in the Czech Republic is replaced by rebranding of strategies and institutions, which should take care of the creation and support of good image of the Czech Republic abroad. We can agree on

the fact that we should do something about the state of Czech society internally and its reputation in relation to foreign countries. The contrast between aims in the listed strategic documents, which emphasize the long-term cultural tradition in the Czech Republic and the current negative image, which the Czech Republic keeps building (euroscepticism, corruption, political instability, racism, non-uniform image of the Czech Republic abroad), is quite striking. If we add limited awareness of the region the Czech Republic belongs to (and the time when we compared political stability of Central Europe with Balkan is over), the interdisciplinary debate among institutions about the image of the Czech Republic on the national and regional level seems to be one of possible ways out of current atmosphere of social decay. However, it should not be inspired by a highly ironical and almost offensive motto “We shall show it to Europe” (ed. note: verbatim translation is “We shall sweeten it up for Europe!”) used during Czech presidency in 2009.

Simon Alholt offers a simple manual with the set of basic questions: “instead of asking: What can we say to make the Czech Republic famous?, we should ask: What can we do to make the Czech Republic significant? Instead of asking how to enchant or force people to admire the Czech Republic or look for new ways to tell them how marvellous it is, we should ask: Why should people in other countries primarily think about the Czech Republic? What are the priorities of the Czech Republic? What is its contribution to solution of global problems and its role in the United Nations? There is not any connection with advertising, public relations or branding. Everything connected with proper public administration and good leadership is important.”³³

The question whether to brand or not to brand seems pointless to me. It is startling to read the following words by Petr Pithart, prime Czech politician of the post-1989 era: “We have gone through the past twenty years with faint-hearted motivations and phobias and in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia, some of them led to dissolution of the state twenty years ago. In this sense, nothing interesting has happened in our country. We have not undergone any crisis or a harsh test..., we have not experienced any catharsis for that matter... Czech society is not a confined society yet but we cannot say that it has ‘opened’ more during the past twenty years.”³⁴ It is typical that we forget the potential of the cultural and intellectual community, which has experienced a lot of existential tests, essential development of thought and it opened for international cooperation. And by the way: Did cultural and spiritual heritage in the history of the Czech Republic originate under different circumstances? In her documentary essay Prague: the Restless Heart of Europe from 1984, Věra Chytilová repeats the motto “The most important thing is the awareness of the context”. If we do not want to be a cheap post-communist postcard where the time stopped in chaos and turbulence of social, political and economic changes after 1989, we should fill this set with new contemporary stories. It is a major mistake of Czech politics and society that they do not ask for such stories in contemporary art. It is probably absurd but in the time of crisis, art and culture should finally become the flagship of the positive course of the Czech Republic heading to the functional heart of Europe and member of the global community, which self-confidently and steadily occupies its place on the crossroads of West European powers, Central European

30 neighbours and East European cultures. ◊

Branding countries

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34 Pithart, Petr: One state becomes two. Why and how did it happen? [Z jednoho státu dva. Proč a jak se to stalo?] in Bútorá, Martin – Mesežnikov, Grigorij – Bútorová, Zora – Kollár, Miroslav: From where and where to, Twenty years of independence, [Odkiaľ a kam, Dvadsať rokov samostatnosti], p. 29.