



**The
Czech Centres
Strategy**

2024—2027

Introduction

Communication in its many forms is an increasingly important ingredient in international relations. The current geopolitical situation is once again splitting the world along value lines. And the rise of artificial intelligence-driven disruption, as well as the spread of misinformation, show the importance of authentic engagement with others.

This also increases the importance of cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy more generally, of which the Czech Centres are a key instrument.¹ A contributory organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, the Czech Centres operate 26 branches on 4 continents, representing Czechia through culture in its broadest sense: arts, cultural and creative sectors, language education, science, research, innovations, and other expressions of creative and social life. The Czech Centres core mission is to build relations with the foreign public and promote the country's reputation abroad.

Czechia is a country with an active foreign policy that builds on a strong democratic tradition. In recent years, the country has successfully risen to key challenges, including the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022 and the response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Czechia continues to strengthen its existing partnerships and is seeking new global partners – while being a country widely known for its culture.

¹ For a definition of “cultural diplomacy” and “public diplomacy” see the terms and acronyms at the end of the Strategy.

The story of Czech public diplomacy includes the tradition personified by Václav Havel, the first Czech president, politician and artist-playwright, which demonstrates the power of art and its role in positive social change. Standing testimony to the power of public diplomacy, this story both plays a crucial role in building the country's reputation and has a wider significance. It is an instrument to shape a world based on openness and respect, on responsibility for the society in which we operate, and on the powerful role of culture and dialogue in it. As such, it is not a mere "ornament", but a manner of relating to the world.

The Czech Centres (CC) Strategy 2024–2027 is being drafted at a unique moment when preparations are underway for a new form of three documents crucial for Czechia's engagement with the foreign public: The Foreign Policy Concept, the Concept of Czechia's Uniform Presentation, and the Czech Centres Strategy. The document aims to describe the current state of affairs, clearly define the Czech Centres competences, and propose the institution's development in the next period.

Part one of the Strategy outlines a vision of how the Czech Centres should operate in 2027, opening with a summary of the institution's current state of affairs in 2024. The baseline description draws on a SWOT analysis², which examines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks to the work of the Czech Centres, and on four consultations

with key Czech Centres partners in early 2024 (see below). The analytical part is followed by the design part covering three strategic objectives and their corresponding sub-objectives and measures. The Czech Centres Strategy 2024–2027 will be followed by the Action Plan and partial strategic documents specified in individual measures. For the key terms and acronyms used in the Strategy, including the definition of public and cultural diplomacy, see the last page.

The document is a follow-up to the previous Czech Centres Strategy and will guide both the institution's main strategic considerations in the next period at the level of the Czech Centres Headquarters (CCHQ) and individual Czech Centres Abroad (CCA) in building their own programmes for the next period. It will also show our partners the direction in which we want to develop in the next four years and the opportunities for cooperation that are opening up and will receive priority. Last but not least, the document is a report for the general public that we are seeking to involve, to the greatest extent possible, in the discussion on Czech cultural and public diplomacy and in the country's presentation abroad.



Jitka Pánek Jurková
Director General

Baselines 2024

The Strategy is based on a thorough review of the Czech Centres operations, including the challenges faced in recent years. The Czech Centres operations have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, unstable geopolitical situation in several locations where the institution is present, and rapid developments in the digital and information sector. **At this time of dramatic change, we first had to ask ourselves: what role do we play and should we play in the current geopolitical and social constellation?** The Czech Centres Strategy 2024–2027 answers these questions, charting the institution's direction in the coming years.

The four consultations³ conducted within the analytical part of the Strategy make it clear that the Czech Centres are an indispensable institution: they operate a wide network of foreign branches focusing on the cultural and general public in their respective countries while having a unique know-how to communicate with that public. The foreign branches are managed by professionals and staffed by stable and enthusiastic teams. The Czech cultural scene appreciates their support in foreign activities. The individual Czech Centres Abroad enjoy an excellent reputation of being active and reliable partners. This allows them to involve Czech artists in highly prestigious events like PhotoWien 2023, Paris Design Week 2023, Triennale Milano 2022 and more. They help build networks and cooperate with foreign

³ Consultations to date:

7/2/2024 The Coordination Council for Public Diplomacy, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

22/2/2024 A public consultation on the Czech Centres Strategy, attended by cultural and social figures

5/3/2024 A consultation with the directors of the Czech Centres Abroad

19/3/2024 A consultation at the Czech Centres Headquarters

media outlets (e.g. recent engagement with the BBC, France Culture, Süddeutsche Zeitung and more). They play an indispensable role in providing high-quality language courses (including the organisation of certified exams), thus promoting interest in Czechia and its culture. The Czech Centres Abroad currently teach the Czech language to some 2,000 students, with Madrid, Cairo and Belgrade being the latest additions to the list of cities where courses are held.

Compared to cultural institutes operated by similarly sized countries, the Czech Centres are viewed as a progressive and active player with above-standard representation in EUNIC⁴. The network size is commensurate to the size and position of the country.

The analysis also highlights the need for a clear strategic framework for Czech Centres operations and for coherent targeting. The occasional fragmentation in the Czech Centres programme impacts the clarity of the country's presentation abroad. The emphasis on the quantity of events may compromise their quality and purposefulness. In each territory, the activities of diplomatic missions and the Czech Centres must complement each other and make a logical whole.

The financial dimension of Czech Centres operations is a key aspect. The Czech Centres have a stable income stream thanks to a growing availability of language courses and active fundraising by the Czech

Centres Headquarters and the directors of the Czech Centres Abroad. In recent years, the Czech Centres have obtained a number of major grants (two multi-year projects funded by the EU External Action programme, a project from the Creative Europe programme called CycleUP! and a project from the Erasmus+ programme), each Czech Centre Abroad is also involved in regular negotiations with partners on financial and barter cooperation in individual activities. Major cost-saving measures were also implemented in 2023, including the reduction of foreign teams in 11 Czech Centres Abroad.⁵ Despite these measures, finances remain tight: the Czech Centres total budget, which consists of the founder's contributions and income from own operations, falls behind the rising costs (caused, among other things, by the network expansion and inflation).

The agenda of the institution's Prague headquarters has been extended to include two new areas which provide an exceptional opportunity to engage in major public diplomacy initiatives with a significant potential. These areas are the inclusion of the Office of the Commissioner General of Czechia's Participation in the EXPO Universal Exhibition under the Czech Centres in 2023 and the Czech Centres participation in the 4th pillar of the BOEP⁶ Czech-Taiwanese Multi-Project. In this project, the Czech Centres help foster Czech-Taiwanese cultural relations. Naturally, this agenda puts additional strain on the Prague headquarters staff.

⁵ Most Czech Centres Abroad currently employ a director and one or two, exceptionally three, employees.

⁶ The Business Opportunities Enhancement Programme 2023–2027.

Our values

The Czech Centres have set themselves these cardinal institutional values for the next period:

- > Attention to the social context, responsibility for society and the role of culture in society
- > Pride in Czech and European culture, support for democratic values
- > Openness, creativity and intellectual curiosity
- > Respect for diversity, trust in dialogue
- > Environmental and social sustainability

Vision 2027

DESIGN PART

Our explicit objective is to make public diplomacy by 2027 a **strategic part of the Czech foreign policy**, which will be making use of **the high cultural credibility of our country and the possibility of direct communication with the foreign public**. We know that dialogue with the foreign public is essential. Public diplomacy is a means of reaching out to audiences abroad without resorting to simplistic narratives. This allows us to build lasting and rich relations with foreign countries, foster an open society and inspire each other.

The Czech Centres must be able **to respond to specific contexts while also acting strategically**. The Czech Centres strategy will always reflect the long-term Foreign Policy Concept while, in return, foreign policy should treat public diplomacy as one of its priorities. Activities of the Czech Centres will be instrumental in building Czechia's image abroad as a reliable and confident partner and help shape the future on the basis of its intrinsically democratic and value-based Central European anchorage and a rich cultural, creative and innovative environment. To fulfil this vision, the Czech Centres will be able to attract partners, and map the foreign public's attitudes and respond directly to them.

The Czech Centres will continue to serve as **a gateway for the networking** of artists, people active in society and opinion-makers. In particular, they will be **a strong partner for the Czech cultural scene**. As part of

mutual cooperation, the Czech Centres will always respect and strive for the high quality of the Czech cultural scene. Any content presented by the Czech Centres will always be **artistically and intellectually valuable and authentic** – be it an exhibition in a prestigious gallery, a series of debates on the ethics of new technologies or an open-air film festival. The Czech Centres will be able to well define their target audiences – generally and subsequently also geographically. They will sustain the diversity of their target groups, whether they are art lovers, young people or some other specific group, always knowing the reason for doing so. They will be proficient in defining their cultural programmes and familiar in dealing with the media.

The Czech Centres will become increasingly important venues to **communicate democratic values**. Through the Czech Centres, Czechia will initiate discussion and solutions regarding current and relevant topics. The Czech Centres Abroad will help make a positive difference in the societies of the countries where they operate.

The Czech Centres will consistently work to high institutional standards, always taking into account the social and environmental impacts of their activities. The Czech Centres Abroad will continue to be staffed by creative professionals and will remain a leader in EUNIC and other groups. The EXPO agenda will be organically integrated into the Czech Centres network – their activities will complement each other.

The expectations placed on Czech Centres activities will be in line with the network's budget. Financially, the Czech Centres will be a **stable institution**, with the founder's contribution and income from grants and language courses being complemented by partnerships with private entities. These private entities will view the Czech Centres as their partner of choice that works abroad with the best of Czech culture, doing so in a diplomatic context and in a consistently sophisticated manner.

Conditions cannot be expected to become ideal by 2027. However, the Czech Centres will be sufficiently respected and confident as an institution to successfully respond to a variety of challenges.

Strategic objective 1: A stronger position of culture in Czechia's external relations

The importance of public and cultural diplomacy is growing in the contemporary world. The Czech Centres will unlock this potential through a more strategic cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other stakeholders. Concurrently, they will be taking care of the public and cultural sphere, the vitality of which is a prerequisite for success.

Sub-objective 1: Broad discussion on Czech public diplomacy

1. Boosting Czechia's self-confidence in this area, where we have exceptional potential
2. Engaging the public, media and other stakeholders in various ways in the discussion on Czech public diplomacy

Sub-objective 2: The Czech Centres as a partner for an open cultural scene both in Czechia and abroad

1. Supporting healthy cultural institutions and building lasting relations with them
2. Contributing to mutual inspiration – both bringing topics from Czechia to foreign countries and sharing good practice from abroad

3. Engaging culture as a means of understanding the complexities of the contemporary world – developing interdisciplinary formats and interdisciplinary collaborations
4. Being a respectful partner for the cultural sphere, including appropriate remuneration for each cooperation

Sub-objective 3: Closer cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in public diplomacy

1. Participating in the drafting of the next Concept of Czechia's Uniform Presentation abroad
2. Jointly developing strategic plans for public diplomacy activities in relation to the Foreign Policy Concept and the Concept of Czechia's Uniform Presentation
3. Coordinating the activities of the Czech Centres Abroad and diplomatic missions in their respective countries
4. Stabilising the network in the context of foreign policy priorities
 - a. Supporting the Czech Centres Abroad in foreign policy priority countries through assistance from the Czech Centres Headquarters, including those Czech Centres based in locations with multilateral overlap – Brussels and New York
 - b. Supporting the Czech Centre Kyiv as an important partner for the Ukrainian cultural sector

- c. Focusing on Asia in the framework of the activities of the new Czech Centres Abroad (Hanoi, Taipei) and in connection with EXPO 2025 in Osaka

Sub-objective 4: Building synergy with other ministries, private entities and non-governmental actors in presenting Czechia abroad

1. Initiating foreign presentation-related sharing between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, involving other relevant ministries and institutions; seeking joint opportunities for high-impact foreign presentation (e.g. EXPO 2025, Frankfurt Book Fair 2026 in the years to come)
2. Cooperating with as many local actors as possible (both institutions and Czechs living abroad, Czech language and literature lecturers sent to foreign universities, teachers sent to Czech communities) to present Czechia effectively and synergistically

Strategic objective 2: The Czech Centres as a prominent participant in dialogue on the shape of the contemporary world

The Czech Centres have the ambition to be Czechia's audible voice in international dialogue on the shape of the contemporary world. They are a player with a clear set of values and enter into discussions on current issues.

Sub-objective 1: The Czech Centres are an actor with a clear set of values

1. Embedding the fundamental values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Preamble to the Constitution of the Czech Republic in Czech Centres activities as principles, method of work and topics of activities
2. Supporting actors sharing our values, especially in those territories where they are in a precarious position
3. Emphasising the formats that contribute to free sharing of ideas and dialogue – curatorial trips, journalistic trips, debates, participatory formats
4. Relating to European values (including cooperation within

EUNIC and with the European Commission delegations in the countries concerned)

Sub-objective 2: The Czech Centres contribute to debates on topical issues

1. Mapping current issues and processing them in a way that promotes dialogue and avoids polarisation
2. Supporting scientific and economic diplomacy and the innovation sector, in particular by showcasing Czech achievements, in cooperation with professional partners and the private sector
3. Highlighting classical topics (e.g. important anniversaries) that remain relevant today

Strategic objective 3: The Czech Centres as a professional cultural institute

The Czech Centres must be a professionally run cultural institute: they have a strong profile, know how to communicate well, and treat their partners and staff with respect. Their funding is in line with their role.

Sub-objective 1: Strong institutional dramaturgy

1. Putting the quality of events before their quantity
 - a. Strict requirements for content quality
 - b. Participation in prestigious international platforms
 - c. Visible initiatives with media coverage
 - d. Events with prestigious partners
 - e. Events featuring a unique profile/theme for a specific territory
2. Focusing on the key target audiences defined
 - a. Opinion-makers and public elites in individual countries
 - b. Message multipliers (media, influencers)
 - c. Groups that share our values and need support in their country

- d. Young generation, especially university students and recent graduates
 - e. People interested in culture, language and international relations
 - f. Czech communities and expatriates and their family members and friends
3. Evaluating the impact of activities and adapting further activities accordingly

Sub-objective 2: Strengthened institutional communication

1. Developing a communication strategy
2. Improving online communication standards
3. Focusing on engagements with foreign media

Sub-objective 3: Better work with staff to ensure the institution's effective development

1. Setting up competencies and tools for professional management of teams both at the Czech Centres Headquarters and in the territories (including work with local staff and trainees)
2. Improving the sharing and maintenance of know-how in the network
3. Supporting the directors and teams of the Czech Centres Abroad in countries with a difficult security situation

Sub-objective 4: A stabilised financial situation

1. Aligning the network size and funding so that the Czech Centres can carry out its activities to high standards
2. Continuing the development of multi-source financing
 - a. Seeking joint foreign opportunities with the private sector
 - b. Synergies with other public administration institutions, joint financing of projects
 - c. Work within EUNIC, including continued efforts to apply for its grants
 - d. Providing support for language courses as a means of public diplomacy and as an income stream

Sub-objective 5: Integrating the core values into the institution's operations

1. Embedding social and environmental sustainability standards into the institution's operations, including reducing the environmental impact of activities and working appropriately with people
2. Drafting strategic documents in this area (Code of Conduct, Equal Opportunities Plan, etc.) and evaluating their impl.
3. Maintaining an internal discussion on the Czech Centres core values and becoming a good example of a state institution also in this area

Conclusion

The Strategy for 2024 to 2027 shows that the Czech Centres are prepared for the challenges posed by the current geopolitical situation, social development and technological advancements.

The next four years covered by this Strategy are bound to be a tense period in international relations. This adds to the importance of being able to promote democratic values also through Czech Centres activities by contributing to authentic international communication and open dialogue. It will be no less important to reflect these values in artistic and intellectual work that can attract the attention of a wide foreign public. As a platform for growing and strengthening Czech public and cultural diplomacy, the Czech Centres can and want to play an important role in this.

SWOT analysis

ANNEX

Strengths

- > A unique position – a wide network of foreign branches with a focus on public diplomacy, excellent knowledge of the public debate and cultural scene in the respective countries
 - > The territorial presence of the Czech Centres Abroad is aligned with the current foreign policy priorities
 - > The network size is comparable to similarly sized European countries
 - > The directors of the Czech Centres Abroad are qualified professionals
 - > The Czech Centres Abroad have proficient teams able to provide consistent support to Czech representatives and devise and run their own activities
 - > A stable proportion of grants and partner contributions at the level of both the Czech Centres Headquarters and the Czech Centres Abroad;
- end of dependence on income generated by the Czech House in Moscow
 - > Well-established and functional forms of networking, including curatorial and journalistic trips
 - > The Czech Centres play a vital role in teaching Czech abroad and offer high-quality language courses
 - > A significant role in EUNIC – the directors of the Czech Centres Abroad often have a leading role, strong representation in EUNIC activities, participation in European dialogue on the role of international cultural relations
 - > Operational cooperation with diplomatic missions and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tends to be very good; the Czech Centres and diplomatic missions complement each other: the prestige of embassies and the efficiency of teams of the Czech Centres Abroad provide an attractive institutional background

- > In many territories, there is synergy with other Czech institutions in promoting Czechia
- > An institutional culture of creativity, authentic interest in others, openness and dialogue
- > The Czech Centres Abroad are an important gateway for individuals (especially young talents) into a foreign environment and enjoy a reputation that allows them to pair these individuals with high-quality partners
- > Occasional inconsistency in the cultural programme of the individual Czech Centres Abroad
- > Giving the quantity of events more emphasis than their quality and purposefulness
- > The target audience is not always well defined
- > Insufficient implementation of the challenges related to the environmental crisis in the institution's activities

Weaknesses

- > Lack of support inside Czechia – insufficient knowledge of the potential of Czech public diplomacy, lack of broader discussion on its role
- > A weak institutional brand in Czechia
- > A decline in action potential due to the mismatch between the growing network and funds available

Opportunities

- > The growing importance of public diplomacy in the more complex geopolitical context
- > The growing importance of authentic communication with the foreign public in the context of the rise of artificial intelligence-driven misinformation and disruption
- > The digital space as an opportunity

for Czech Centres activities

- > The inclusion of the Office of the Commissioner General for EXPO in the Czech Centres network is an opportunity to boost Czechia's uniform presentation abroad, liaise with new partners and acquire more know-how in an important territory
- > Participation in the BOEP project – presence in a new geopolitically important territory, more activities in Asia

Threats

- > The strategic anchoring of the public diplomacy agenda remains weak
- > Geopolitical challenges – political instability in some countries where the Czech Centres are based, potential physical threat to Czech Centres teams, restrictions on activities
- > Budget constraints leading to operations being scaled down

- > Additional strain on the institution due to the inclusion of the Office of the Commissioner General for EXPO in the Czech Centres network
- > Mismatch between working time limits (associated with a lack of funds for operations) and opportunities and expectations
- > Environmental challenges (e.g. global warming) pose a range of issues to the Czech Centres, including the environmental impacts of activities, related cost, and whether the activity is necessary and sustainable

- > Some countries where the Czech Centres operate experience instability due to the rise of misinformation
- > Competition between the digital space and, for example, authentic artistic performances, and its consequences, including a shift in audience behaviour

Key terms and acronyms

CC – Czech Centres

CCA – Czech Centres Abroad

DCCA – Directors of Czech Centres Abroad

CCHQ – Czech Centres Headquarters

OCG EXPO – Office of the Commissioner General of Czechia's Participation in the EXPO Universal Exhibition

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MC – Ministry of Culture

EUNIC – The European Union National Institutes for Culture (an association of European institutes for culture, cultural diplomacy sections of ministries and similar organisations).

Cultural diplomacy – A targeted activity by state actors who help achieve foreign policy objectives through the dissemination of a country's culture.

Public diplomacy – An umbrella category for all types of activities that target the foreign public with the aim to promote foreign policy. A broader term than cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy also includes, for example, communication campaigns etc.

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