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Development of Relations Between China and Czechoslovakia and Its Successor States, Czechia and Slovakia

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Abstract: Over the past 72 years since China established diplomatic relations with Czechoslovakia in 1949, bilateral relations between China and Czechoslovakia and its successor states, Czechia and Slovakia, have seen ups and downs, thanks to evolving domestic and international situations. While China-Czechoslovakia relations showed distinguishing features in different periods, relationships between China and Czechia, and between China and Slovakia have patterns of their own. To be more specific, China-Czechia relations have experienced more twists and turns influenced by factors like ideology, partisan interests, and history which led Czech political elites to adopt different policies towards China.

Keywords: China, Czechoslovakia, Czechia, Slovakia, bilateral relations

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949, Czechoslovakia was the fifth country to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with PRC. Over the past 72 years, given the combined effect of domestic politics and evolving international landscape, China’s relations with Czechoslovakia and its successor states, Czechia and Slovakia, have seen ups and downs. Keenly aware of the challenges faced by China to rebuild the nation, Czechoslovakia had provided much-needed economic and technical assistance which helped forge closer ties. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on December 31, 1992, China remains committed to enhancing friendship and cooperation with the two successor states. Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC Cooperation), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership have provided further impetus to strengthen relations between China and the two countries, and to create new opportunities for in-depth political dialogue, economic and trade cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. In recent years, however, changes unseen in a century and influence of the U.S. and the EU have sowed discord in the relations.

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1 Background of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations Between China and Czechoslovakia

On October 1, 1949, the People’s Republic of China was born. On October 6, Czechoslovakia established diplomatic relations with China, shortly after the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. The establishment of ties both reflected the evolution of domestic and international situations and enduring friendship between the two peoples.

1.1 Evolution of Domestic and International Situations

At the very beginning, China inherited a worrying situation and had to grapple with many challenges. The international landscape posed another tricky problem: Two blocs represented by the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in bitter rivalry. Anti-China forces led by the U.S. tried to contain China through military threats, political encirclement and economic blockade. It means that the priorities of China’s foreign policy were to safeguard national interests, break imperialist isolation, strengthen governance and revive the economy. Back then it was China’s natural choice to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

In the wake of the February events in 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) gained nationwide leadership. To secure its position, the party strengthened ties with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. In November 1948, President Klement Gottwald announced that strong alliance with the Soviet Union was the primary and fundamental condition for the existence of a people’s democratic state. Shortly thereafter, the country changed from a former ally of the Soviet Union to one of its satellite states with unquestioning obedience (Dejmek, 2010). The fact that countries in the Socialist Camp, such as Czechoslovakia, established diplomatic relations with China is the materialization of their national interests and the practice of justice. As for the former, these countries were driven by their own strategic interests to provide support for China to gain a foothold in the international arena. On the other hand, it is worth noting that their support extended from China’s revolutionary period into the birth of PRC. Their sympathy, support and diplomatic recognition spoke volumes about enduring friendship and amity between the peoples (Chen, 2009).
1.2 Enduring Friendship

China and Czechoslovakia have shared a close bond for a long time. As early as the beginning of the 19th century, Czechoslovakia sent experts in beer brewing and glassmaking to China (Jiang, 2016).

In June 1919, the Republic of China and the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) achieved mutual recognition. In 1930, the two countries signed the Friendship and Commerce Treaty. On December 6, 1932, the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Edvard Beneš delivered a speech that was the most radical condemnation of Japanese aggression against China at the headquarter of the League of Nations in Geneva. This speech won great sympathy for both Edvard Beneš and Czechoslovakia in China (Bakešová, 2020). From 1919 to 1939, China-Czechoslovakia relations were further strengthened through economic and trade exchanges. Since Czechoslovakia was an industrial power, its export far outweighed import from China, with machinery and arms as major items. In the 1920s and 1930s, when China’s own industry was still in its infancy, Czechoslovakia helped China build its first power plant of real significance in the then Zhabei District (now part of Jing’an District), Shanghai.

2 Distinct Features of China-Czechoslovakia Relations in Different Periods

From 1949 to 1992, influenced by the political landscape both at home and abroad, the bilateral relations assumed noticeable features in different periods.

2.1 The Golden Period (1949–1960)

In spite of the huge geographical distance, China and Czechoslovakia had conducted close cooperation in the ten years since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Brotherly partnership was evidenced in six aspects.

1) Frequent mutual visits by high-ranking officials. In the 1950s, China’s senior officials including Zhu De, Peng Zhen, Dong Biwu and Peng Dehuai visited Czechoslovakia while in return their leaders like Prime Minister Viliam Široký, National Assembly Speaker Zdeněk Fierlinger and President Antonín Novotný made successive visits to China.

2) Mutual support in solving problems of international concern. Czechoslovakia supported the restoration of the lawful seat of the People’s Republic of China in
the UN and the liberation of Taiwan, opposed the fabrication of the so-called “two Chinas”, and backed China’s efforts to quell Tibetan rebellion and protect territorial seas. China supported Czechoslovakia’s fight against West German militarism and revanchism (Web of China, 2005).

3) A large number of agreements to enhance cooperation. In May 1952, China and Czechoslovakia signed an agreement on technological cooperation, the first intergovernmental agreement signed by China in this field. In March 1957, the Prime Ministers of the two countries signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation Between the People’s Republic of China and Czechoslovak Republic, covering culture, education, postal services, telecommunications, broadcasting and many other areas.

4) A great deal of economic and technical assistance provided by Czechoslovakia for China. In fact, Czechoslovakia was the second largest provider of assistance after the Soviet Union. Technicians were sent who helped trained a large number of engineers, 670 sets of modern agricultural equipment and machinery donated, and a friendship farm designated in Cangzhou, Hebei Province. Indeed, Czech engineers deserved the credit for modernizing China’s industry by enabling a friendship factory in Shenyang, Liaoning Province to manufacture the first horizontal boring mill, and the first rocker drilling machine (Han, 2016).

5) Notable achievements in economic and trade cooperation. In 1950, the two countries signed the first agreement on the exchange and payment of goods. Czechoslovak statistics show that bilateral trade soared from 113 million Czech koruna (CZK) in 1950 to CZK 1,405 billion in 1959 (Lauerová, 2007). Major exports from China were raw materials such as iron ore, tin, raw rubber, wool and tobacco, and foodstuffs like tea, rice, vegetable oil and meat products. Czechoslovak exports include equipment sets, machine tools, forging press, trucks and tractors. China had become the fifth largest trading partner of Czechoslovakia, while the latter was the third largest to the former, after the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

6) A wide array of joint programs in culture and education. In December 1950, Czechoslovakia sent a delegation to China. It was a prelude for cultural exchanges between the two countries. In May 1952, the first agreement on cultural cooperation was signed. In October of the same year, Lu Xun Library was established in Prague, housing the most extensive collection on sinology in Central Europe. This was followed by exhibitions, film weeks, concerts, opera performances and literary translation projects. From 1953, intergovernmental student exchange programs were launched one after another. Prestigious universities in Czechoslovakia such as Charles University, Masaryk University and Czech Technical University in Prague trained a wealth of talented
personnel for China. In 1954, the Department of Czech Language and Literature was set up at Peking University.

2.2 From Strained Relations to Resumed Rapport (1960–1989)

The early 1960s witnessed increasingly strained Sino-Soviet relations soured by ideological confrontation. Given that Czechoslovakia had closer ties with the Soviet Union in politics, economics and military, China-Czechoslovakia relationship encountered headwinds. High-level political exchanges were brought to an end, and economic and cultural cooperation was significantly undermined. In 1963, Czechoslovak Consulate General in Shanghai was closed, along with the office of Xinhua News Agency in Prague. In 1967, interparty relations were cut off. On August 21, 1968, Warsaw Pact forces led by the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia under the pretext of stalling the “Prague Spring” reforms. This interference was condemned by Premier Zhou Enlai. China expressed discontent and criticism when KSC leader Gustáv Husák rose to power in 1969, bringing Czechoslovakia and Soviet relations even closer. Clear evidence was seen in 1963 trade volume which plummeted to 15% of that in 1959. The gloomy picture had not changed until 1969 (Lauerová, 2007).

The situation took a turn for the better as China and the Soviet Union resumed diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level and signed new trade agreements in 1970. Member states of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) including Czechoslovakia began to strengthen relations with China. In June 1971, China reassigned her ambassador to Czechoslovakia after a four-year suspension. In October of the same year, Czechoslovakia supported the restoration of China’s lawful seat in the UN. In 1973, the operation of Xinhua News Agency and Czech News Agency (ČTK) was normalized, along with mutual visits of vice ministers of foreign trade on a regular basis, and cross-disciplinary meetings on technological cooperation. In the same year, the two sides also signed a protocol on barter and settlement methods. From 1973 to 1978, bilateral trade had kept growing.

In the mid-1980s, China-Czechoslovakia relations were fully normalized. Frequent mutual visits of senior officials during the period of 1986–1989 were resumed to the level of the 1950s. In 1986, interparty relations began to show the sign of normalization, as Czechoslovakia foreign minister made his first official visit to China since the establishment of the diplomatic relations. In 1987, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian visited Czechoslovakia, representing the ministry to sign a cooperation protocol and exchanged notes on the establishment of the consulates general in Shanghai and Bratislava. In the same year, Czechoslovak Prime Minister Lubomír Štougal visited China. In 1988, KSČ General
Secretary Miloš Jakeš and Czechoslovak President Gustáv Husák paid visits to China, and Vice Premier of China Yao Yilin returned the visit.

The two countries agreed to establish a committee on economic, technical, trade and scientific cooperation, signed a 10-year agreement on economic and technical cooperation, and entered into agreements where Czechoslovakia provided two 500,000-kilowatt generators, and where the two governments prevent double taxation and tax evasion, and mapped a blueprint for long-term economic, scientific and technical cooperation. Technological transfers were also gaining momentum as Czechoslovakia transferred technologies like the manufacturing of air-jet spinning machines and motor lorries. In 1989, trade volume hit a record high of USD 910 million (Web of China, 2005).

2.3 New Challenges Facing Bilateral Relations (1990–1992)

Dramatic political changes in November 1989 influenced Czechoslovakia in two ways: transformation from a socialist to a capitalist country, and historic opportunities to break away from the control of the Soviet Union and take the initiative to formulate China policies. Since Czechoslovakia had no political interests in the Far East, policy priorities were to maintain appropriate relations with China while benefitting from her economic prosperity (Fürst, 2004). The Chinese government respected the right of Czechoslovakia to choose its own development path, and followed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence regardless of differences in social systems, ideologies and values (Yan, 2009).

This period saw a decrease in high-level visits. In September 1991, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen paid an official visit to Czechoslovakia, and in December, Czechoslovak Prime Minister Marian Calfa returned the visit. Bilateral relations were affected by differences of opinion on issues related to Tibet, Taiwan, human rights etc.

In 1991, bilateral trade was settled in cash instead of bookkeeping, drastically decreasing the trade volume which maintained at a low level even after steady increase.

3 Development of China-Czechia and China-Slovakia Relations

On January 1, 1993, on the map of Central Europe appeared two new sovereign states: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. On the same day, China
recognized the two countries and established diplomatic relations with them at the ambassadorial level. Both sides agreed to continue to use October 6, 1949 as the date of establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the new states.

After independence, like other Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), the two countries were committed to achieving political and economic transformation, shifting the focus of foreign policy to join the EU and NATO at an earlier date, and strengthening relations with neighboring countries. In the early 1990s, China introduced the strategy of “keeping a low profile”. Connection and understanding of the three countries were limited since China enhanced economic cooperation with Western countries, and CEECs had closer ties with Western Europe. Nevertheless, combined effects of the international financial crisis and euro-zone debt crisis presented an opportunity for China and CEECs to engage more. China-CEEC Cooperation, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership have provided further impetus to strengthen relations between China and the two countries. However, the previous two years had witnessed political tug of war in Czechia and Slovakia, the United States’ alliance with CEECs to contain China, and the EU’s ambivalent claim of China as both partner and systemic rival, thus adding another strain on the relations.

### 3.1 Dramatic Changes in China-Czechia Relations

Czechia’s independence created opportunities for the two countries to resume cooperation. In October 1994, two deputy foreign ministers signed an exchange of letters confirming the continued validity of the treaties and agreements concluded between China and Czechoslovakia. Yet the bilateral relations experience ups and downs due to differences in political systems, values and history which drove the two countries to adopt different perspectives on issues related to Taiwan, Tibet, human rights etc. Trade cooperation, however, sustains the relationship. Steady progress was also made in fields like culture, technology and education. Agreements in these areas were signed on a regular basis.

Further impetus was provided by China-CEEC Cooperation in 2012, BRI in 2013, the election of President Miloš Zeman in 2013, and coalition government led by the Czech Social Democratic Party in 2014. Since the new administration has prioritized Czechia-China relations, rapid progress was palpable in the following five aspects.

1) Frequent high-level visits deepened political mutual trust. In 2014, Czech President and Foreign Minister visited China, the first efforts in their capacities after a 10- and 15-year gap, respectively. From 2014 to 2019, President Miloš Zeman visited China on five occasions. In September 2015, he attended the
conference commemorating the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, the only president of an EU member state to do so. In March 2016, President Xi Jinping paid a historic visit to Czechia, the first of its kind after 67-year diplomatic relations. The two presidents signed a joint declaration on the establishment of a strategic partnership, making China one of Czechia’s eight strategic partners.

2) Czechia had played an active role in the China-CEEC Cooperation and BRI. In August 2014, the second China-CEEC Regional Leaders’ Summit and China Investment Forum 2014 were held in Prague. In June 2015, the first China-CEEC Health Ministers’ Forum was held in Czechia. Czechia-China Centre for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Research, the first one of its kind in the region on government fund was established. In November of the same year, Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka came to China to attend the fourth China-CEEC Summit where the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to promote BRI. In November 2016, during the 5th China-CEEC Summit, the Chinese and Czech governments signed the *Bilateral Cooperation Plan within Framework of the Belt and Road Initiative*, identifying key areas for future cooperation including infrastructure, investment, industry and trade, R&D, transportation and logistics, standards and certification, finance, energy, healthcare, civil aviation, agriculture, culture, tourism, and sub-national cooperation. Czechia is the first European country to develop such a plan with China.

3) Bilateral trade and two-way investment register steady increase. Statistics from Chinese sources show that since 2015, bilateral trade volume of goods has exceeded USD 10 billion for five consecutive years. In 2020, bilateral trade hit USD 18.87 billion, up 7.2% year-on-year, with Chinese exports totaling USD 13.74 billion, down 5.9%, and imports USD 5.13 billion, up 10.9% (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Bilateral trade between China and Czechia accounted for about 20% of China’s total trade with 16 CEECs, making Czechia China’s second largest trading partner in the region after Poland. For Czechia, China is its largest trading partner outside the EU. As of January 2021, China had approved 523 projects owned by Czech investors. The paid-in investment reached USD 310 million. On the other hand, China’s direct investments in Czechia amounted to USD 1.86 billion, and the turnover of China’s engineering contracts reached USD 700 million (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Chinese investments shifted from traditional industries to high-tech sectors, and from equity mergers and acquisitions to greenfield investments including electrical manufacturing, automobile, information technology, transportation and warehousing, finance, real estate and entertainment. In this process, China
had become an important market for Czechia’s leading companies such as Home Credit and Skoda Auto.

4) Financial cooperation had been deepening. This was evidenced by three facts.
   a. Financial institutions in the two countries had enhanced cooperation. During President Xi Jinping’s visit to Czechia in March 2016, China Banking Regulatory Commission and Czech National Bank signed *Statement of Cooperation on Crisis Management*, China Development Bank and Czech J&T Finance Group entered into a framework agreement on financial cooperation, and Bank of China and PPF Group sealed a cooperation agreement. At the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in May 2017, the People’s Bank of China and the Czech Central Bank signed a MOU on cooperation to enhance information exchange and experience sharing.
   b. The number of branches of Chinese banks in Czechia was increasing. In August 2015, the Bank of China opened a branch in Prague. This move was followed by Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) in September 2017. Bank of Communications (BOCOM) was the third to reach Czech clients in May 2019. In fact, this branch represented the bank’s first endeavor to penetrate the CEEC market.
   c. Czech financial service providers made similar efforts. As of July 2019, Home Credit had set up over 260,000 loan companies in 29 provinces and municipalities and 312 cities in China, playing an active role in boosting China’s economic growth and improving people’s livelihoods (Home Credit, 2021).

5) There was a significant increase in interconnectivity. From 2015 to 2017, direct flights from Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Xi’an to Prague were open, to the great convenience of business trips and individual travels. The outbreak of COVID-19 caused an immediate suspension of direct flights between the two countries, reducing Czechia-bound trips from 612,000 in 2019 to about 40,000 in 2020 (Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Cargo transportation has been boosted by the first China-Europe Railway Express between Wuhan and Pardubice in 2012, and between Prague and Yiwu in 2017. COSCO Shipping’s Central Europe office is now headquartered in Prague.

Czech administration changed following the election of the Chamber of Deputies, which took place in October 2017. In October 2018, opposition parties controlled the senate and Prague municipal government. At the same time, China-US relations deteriorated sharply. The EU has labelled China both as partner and systemic rival. All these factors create discord in China-Czechia relationship. In December 2018, the National Cyber and Information Security Agency (NCISA) of
the Czech Republic issued a warning against the use of equipment and software produced by Huawei and ZTE to avoid a security threat. In May 2019, Prague 5G Security Conference was held and participated by representatives from 32 countries, including the United States, Canada and Japan. But China was not invited. Czech’s Security Information Service (BIS) issued annual reports portraying China as a security threat. Prague municipal government publicly challenged the one-China principle on major issues concerning China’s core interests, such as issues related to Taiwan and Tibet. The unfounded provocation forced Beijing and Shanghai municipal governments to suspend sister-city relations with Prague in October 2019 and in January 2020, respectively. From August 30 to September 4, 2019, Miloš Vystrčil, President of the Senate representing the opposition party, led a large delegation to visit Chinese Taiwan. He was criticized by President Miloš Zeman, by Radek Vondráček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and by leaders of the ruling Czech Social Democratic Party which was in the coalition government and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) which had parliamentary representation for undermining the integrity of Czech foreign policy and China-Czechia relations. In a word, his behavior was perceived as a sign of political selfishness. This led President Miloš Zeman to disqualify him from one of top decision-makers, the group of which are composed of the President, President of the Senate and Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and Prime Minister. This is clear proof that Czechia’s China policy was not without noises. President Miloš Zeman has committed himself to promoting friendship and cooperation, and to solving problems for a sound and smooth relationship. In February 2021, he attended China-CEEC Video Conference chaired by President Xi Jinping. In his phone call with President Xi Jinping in July of the same year, he expressed Czechia’s readiness to be the bridge builder between the EU and China.

In September 2021, Czechia passed a law that virtually excludes Chinese and Russian companies from constructing new reactors at the Dukovany Nuclear Power Station. The adoption of the law reflected intensified political struggle in Czechia before the election of Chamber of Deputies in October, the pressure of the U.S. to contain China and Russia, and the EU’s initiative to establish mechanisms for foreign investment oversight.

3.2 China-Slovakia Relations: Steady Progress Amid Challenges

After gaining independence, Slovakia was acutely aware that although China has no great bearing on the country’s interests and foreign policy, it cannot afford to underestimate the importance of China, an ascendant Asian power and a massive
market with great potential. For China respects the development path chosen by
the Slovak people to fit their national conditions. China is also willing to deepen
cooperation. The two countries have identified economic and trade cooperation as
the anchor of the bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, political mutual trust deepened by high-level visits ensures
smooth development of bilateral relations. It is worth noting that despite the fact
that Slovak left-wing and right-wing governments adopted different approaches to
dealing with China, that is, the rightwing governments were bent on forging closer
ties with Chinese Taiwan and preaching human rights, and the left-wing govern-
ments promoted economic cooperation, differences in the overall direction of
foreign policy of Slovakia towards China are not essential until early 2020, when a
center-right coalition government took office (Turcsányi, 2016). The one-China
principle was followed, which means the government refrains from establishing
any form of official contact or communication with Chinese Taiwan. The same
attitude applied to issues related to Tibet and human rights. The only exception
was when a handful of politicians including President Andrej Kiska met Dalai
Lama in October 2016, taking its toll on the bilateral relations. Since 1993,
important mutual visits made by high-ranking officials are as follows: Chinese
senior officials include Li Peng, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Na-
tional People’s Congress (NPC), Premier Wen Jiabao, President Hu Jintao, and
Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC. Slovak leaders
include Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, Speaker Ivan Gašparovič, President
Michal Kováč, Speaker Jozef Migaš, President Rudolf Schuster, Prime Minister
Robert Fico, President Ivan Gašparovič, Speaker Pavol Paška and Speaker Peter
Pellegrini. During the state visit of President Rudolf Schuster to China in January
2003, the two heads of state signed the Joint Declaration of the People’s Republic of
China and the Slovak Republic, and appreciated each other’s achievements in
economic and social development. The two presidents also expressed their wish to
depthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation, maintain engagement on a regular
basis, and attach great importance to mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

In the 1990s, bilateral trade experienced occasional ups and downs, and two-
way investment was at a low level. But as Slovakia opened wider to the outside
world, China acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Slovakia joined
the EU, the two countries shared a stronger bond. China-CEEC Cooperation and BRI
provided fresh impetus. In November 2015, Slovakia signed a MOU with China to
build the BRI, becoming one of the first European countries to support the initia-
tive. In November 2016, China-CEEC Virtual Technology Transfer Center was in-
augurated in Bratislava. Slovakia wanted to get aboard the fast train of China’s
rapid economic growth, attracted Chinese greenfield investments to create jobs,
increased exports to China, improved infrastructure and allured more Chinese
travelers. Endowed with geographical advantage, and low-wage yet well-educated workforce, Slovakia is a transport corridor linking Eurasian networks of broad- and standard-gauge railroads, and has a great potential in R&D and innovation. In the past decade, bilateral trade had soared from USD 3.75 billion in 2010 to USD 9.46 billion in 2020. In 2020, China’s imports from Slovakia were valued at USD 6.43 billion, up 7.8% year-on-year. The figure for exports was USD 3.03 billion, a year-on-year increase of 3.7%. The deficit was on the Chinese side totaling USD 3.4 billion (Ministry of Commerce of China, 2020). Slovakia had become China’s fourth largest trading partner among CEECs, right after Poland, Czechia and Hungary. Slovakia’s major exports included cars, auto parts, machinery and electronics. Its imports from China ranged from machinery, electromechanical products, nuclear reactors, optical instruments and photographic equipment, and footwear. Despite the fact that Slovakia attracted the least Chinese investments compared to other Visegrad Group member states, Chinese investments were expanding into more fields and taking more diversified forms in Slovakia. Cooperation between the two countries made headway in telecommunications, R&D, machinery, automobiles, agriculture and new energy. To date, China-Europe Railway Express has three direct or transit routes, giving the two-way trade a further boost.

Nevertheless, lack of mutual understanding poses a challenge to sustainability of some economic and trade cooperation projects. Slovakia’s new administration formed after February 2020 adopted a foreign policy increasingly leaning towards the EU and the U.S. In January 2021, Slovak Parliament adopted a new security strategy featuring heavy use of narratives created by the EU and NATO. China was portrayed as both an important player and partner in addressing global challenges, as well as an economic and technological competitor and systemic rival of the EU (National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2021). In December 2021, a Slovakian delegation including the Deputy Minister of Economy visited Chinese Taiwan, which clearly violated the one-China principle and seriously damaged the political mutual trust between China and Slovakia.

4 Conclusion

The development of relations between China and Czechoslovakia and between China and the successor states is under the dual influence of internal politics and international landscape. From 1949 to 1960, China and Czechoslovakia had forged a close bond. But ups and downs in political engagement and economic cooperation were seen between 1960 and 1989. After the radical political changes in Czechoslovakia in 1989, the Chinese government rose above the differences in social systems, ideologies and values, and followed policies that facilitated
friendship between the two countries. After the dissolution of Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CSFR) on December 31, 1992, China followed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to promote friendship and cooperation with the two successor states. From 1993 to 2020, ideological differences had led the two countries to take different China policies. As a result, China-Czechia relations experienced more twists and turns than China-Slovakia relations. The more recent identities of the two countries are member states of the EU and NATO. Therefore, their attitudes towards China reflect obvious influences from the EU and the U.S. To address challenges facing the diplomatic relations, the three countries should rise above ideological lines, respect each other’s core interests and major concerns, and reduce external distractions, so as to embark on the journey towards sound and smooth development.

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