

New chapter of history, new normalization

Petr Pavel visited Berlin on Tues. and, in the words of [Seznam Zprávy](#), "gave the Germans the task of taking responsibility for Europe." Pavel said after his [meeting](#) with [Frank-Walter Steinmeier](#) that the situation in Europe and elsewhere has changed significantly as a result of the war in Ukraine and that this puts us in a

position of beginning to write a new chapter of European history. "I'm convinced that it is precisely a country like Germany that can play a decisive role in this phase," Pres. Petr Pavel said.

This is the same Petr Pavel who had said in his [inaugural address](#) that we shouldn't wait for the large countries to come up with solutions: "Where is it written that the smartest and

most capable are always the biggest?" It's also the same Petr Pavel who said critically in [Le Monde](#), with Berlin and Paris in mind, that it's almost impossible to talk with the Russian leadership at this point.

Pavel spoke in Berlin about the newly found self-confidence of Central and Eastern Europe and said that it would be very unfortunate if there were competition between Western Europe and CEE. "I see great sense in taking advantage of the situation we are in now to further strengthen the unity in Europe, because not only the relationship with Russia, but potentially also the global rivalry with China, will require the democratic world to be as united as possible."

U.S. Pres. Joe Biden couldn't have said it better. In fact, Pavel's comments mirrored the language used by Biden and EU Commission Pres. Ursula von der Leyen in a [joint statement on March 10](#). The document contributed to what [Politico](#) called a split at the very top of the EU over the bloc's China policy. The Biden administration, according to Politico, is trying to pressure its Western allies to team up in confronting Beijing.

There's no doubt where the CR stands on the issue. As Pavel was meeting in

Berlin, House Speaker Markéta Pekarová Adamová of TOP 09 was on her way to Taiwan to further U.S. foreign policy.

Pavel probably wouldn't describe it this way, but the new chapter of European history that he spoke of is one in which the U.S. plays a greater role than before in the details of European events. In Berlin,



Pavel was instructing Germany to conform to this new development. He was acting as the messenger.

In the era of Václav Havel, Václav Klaus and Miloš Zeman, which lasted for the first 33 years of post-Communist rule, the overall direction of events was dictated by the victory of the West in the Cold War. The Soviets left, and the Americans took over, but the Americans ran the show with a much more hands-off approach than the Soviets had. The new overall direction in the CR had to be maintained, but there was competition on every level - political, commercial and diplomatic.

Not even under Klaus and Zeman, despite their often-cited inclinations toward Russia and China, did the overall direction shift. There was never a serious discussion about turning away from Western institutions and embracing Russia or China in a true institutional sense. Deals in the two countries by Petr Kellner of PPF or by Zeman's entourage at the Castle were mere details without much geopolitical significance.

The emphasis on Western orientation, but not on the day-to-day details, has been changing in recent years. The details are now more important. The biggest shift was in early 2021 with the attribution of the Vrbětice explosions to Russia. The U.S. and those in the CR and EU who share its ideology got more involved than

before in guiding specific steps of the government, the intelligence and cybersecurity services, the army, the media, NGOs and academia.

Dissenting views are now tolerated much less, even as the exact policy objectives of the U.S. remain uncertain. Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán told [Weltwoche of Switzerland](#) that the goal of the U.S. in Ukraine is

Ví premiér, co vás trápí?

deník

Potřebuje Česko nyní nakoupit supermoderní stíhačky F-35?



■ ANO:..... 13 %
■ NE:..... 87 %



a mystery and that Biden says something different every month. We wrote something similar in the [Final Word](#) in Feb.

Sometimes the emphasis on promoting momentary American interests is seemingly at odds with the wishes of the majority of the Czech people. Do we really need to follow the U.S. in banning TikTok, some of them ask? And an [informal poll by Deník](#) in Dec. found that 87% of respondents didn't think the CR needs to buy supermodern F-35 fighters.

Petr Pavel's first big career boost came during the 20-year period of normalization run from Moscow, when he joined the Communist Party and Military Intelligence. His latest big career boost came during the nascent period of a new normalization run from Washington. We can only hope that this time the crackdown will be milder and shorter.