

OCTOBER 2026

Nº1



CAPS Annual Brochure

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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Human beings tend to have dreams. Most of them remain in the realm of imagination, but from time to time, some come true.

That is the case of our Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) at CEVRO University in Prague. In many ways, it embodies our team's shared interest in the region.

For me, the story began in high school, when I made friends with several members of the Vietnamese diaspora in Czechia. My academic fascination with Asia grew from there. I wrote a short thesis on the U.S. war in Vietnam, which won second place in a national competition for young social scientists.



At university, I focused on China and its role in the global economy and geopolitics, later expanding my interests to India, Japan, Southeast Asia and Central Asia. Recently, this passion was crowned by my starting to learn Korean.

The idea of founding a think tank and research centre focused on Asia had been on my mind for some time. A year ago, CEVRO University gave it the home and support it needed. Here, I would like to thank Dr. Ivan Langer and Jan Zahradil for placing their trust in my vision, our team, and me as a manager.

Since September 2025, we have worked to bring Asian affairs to a wider audience in Czechia and Central Europe. We have published monthly monitoring of major geopolitical and economic developments in Asia (available on our website), along with several practical analyses.

We have also presented our research at international conferences in Poland, Hungary and the United Kingdom, and regularly contributed commentary to Czech and Slovak media, including television and radio, newspapers and podcasts.

Almost every month, we have also organised lectures, discussions and seminars with Czech and Asian scholars, civil servants, ambassadors and other diplomats, including two former foreign ministers from major Asian economies. You can read more about these events in this brochure.

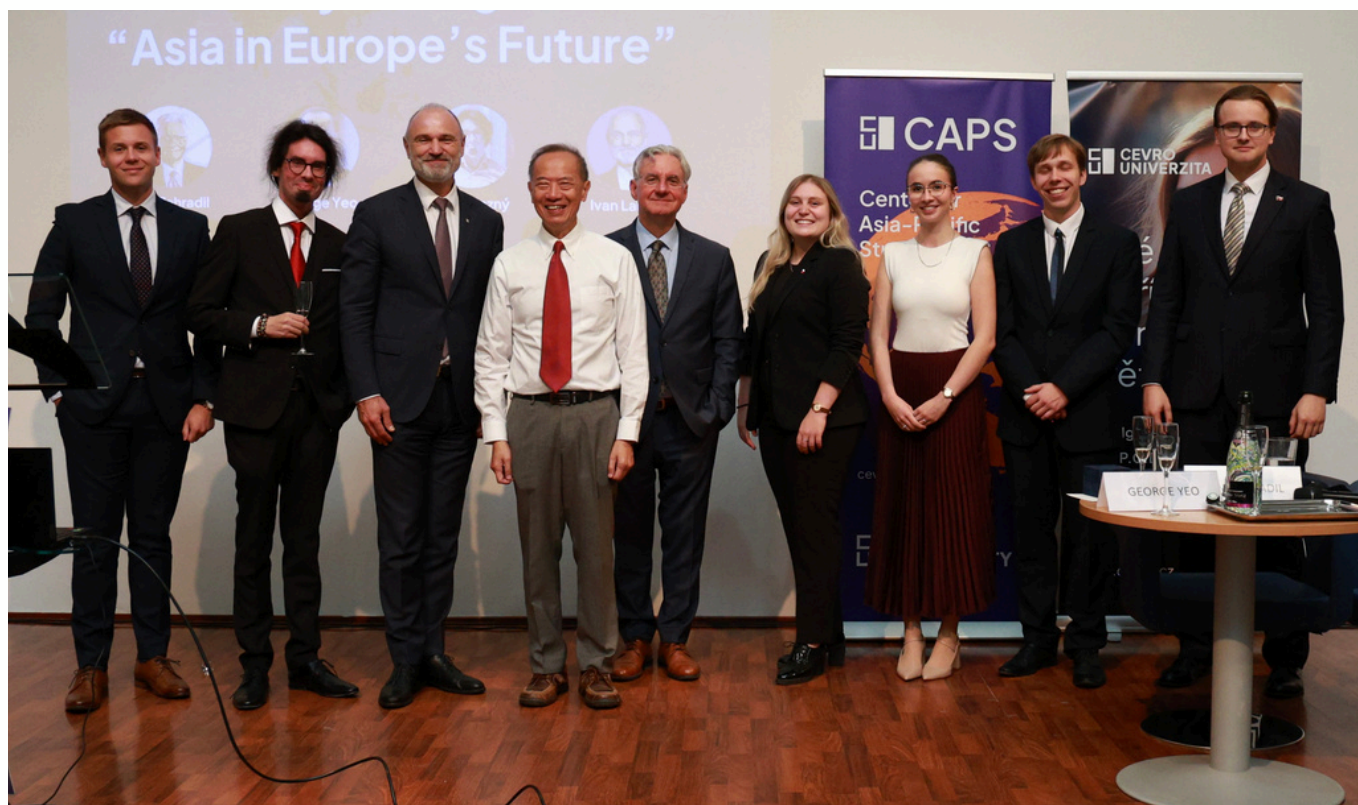
As we begin our second year, our ambition is higher than ever: to become a leading voice on Asia in Czechia and Central Europe. We are already planning new fascinating events and seminars. However, none of this would be possible without the support of CEVRO University, our partners and sponsors, and you, our audience.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for all of this and personally thank my colleagues, as CAPS has always been, and will remain, a team effort. My thanks go to Daniela Fikousová, Kateřina Kovács, Jan Vavřík, Dr. Roman Kodet, Dr. Zdenek Rod, and my right-hand, Viola Vojtová. I am equally grateful to our truly international Advisory Board, chaired by Jan Zahradil, for its expertise and insights.

Dear readers, enjoy this special brochure. We hope you will continue to follow and support our work.

Jan Železný, Ph.D.

Executive Director



ADVISORY BOARD CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

In the European Parliament, Asia is impossible to ignore, especially when you have spent years serving on the Committee on International Trade.

That gave me a close view of the EU's trade negotiations with Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and India, the twists and turns of its relations with China, the growing activity of the Central Asian republics, and other aspects of Asia's rapid development.



I became fascinated by the internal and external dynamics of these countries. I eventually travelled across much of Asia, spoke with people in many places and walks of life, and realised how little attention we pay at home to this geopolitical dimension.

Even before leaving the European Parliament, I began developing a plan for a centre that would study Asia, and the connected Pacific region, systematically, provide analysis and raise public awareness. That is how CAPS, the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies, gradually came into being.

I owe my thanks to Ivan Langer, the founding father of CEVRO University, for embracing my idea with such enthusiasm, giving it a home and the support it needed, and continuing to champion our work

My second thanks go to CAPS Director Jan Železný, who combines deep subject expertise with organisational talent. Among other things, this enabled him to assemble a small but effective and young team of experts in a short time.

Nor should I forget our Advisory Board, which has attracted some truly internationally renowned figures.

CAPS has just celebrated its first birthday. Its first year has brought a wealth of publications, growing media interest and a series of regular events for specialists and the wider public alike. We are on the right path, though in many ways this is still only the beginning. We have every reason to look forward to a successful future, and we intend to work hard to make it happen.

To all of you, thank you for your interest and support – past, present and future.

Jan Zahradil

Chairman of the Advisory Board



OUR MISSION

Over the past few decades, the Asia-Pacific region has transformed from a relatively overlooked area into a geopolitical hotspot and a major driver of the global economy. Its significance in world politics, economics, and other spheres cannot be underestimated. However, the Czech domestic debate remains markedly Sinocentric, often placing less emphasis on other key players and associated topics within the region.

This focus on China is understandable. China is a global economic powerhouse with increasing geopolitical influence and serves as a central actor in various multilateral frameworks – particularly economic and security-oriented ones – such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Taiwan, meanwhile, has emerged as a global hub for advanced technologies, especially artificial intelligence (AI), which is powering the current stage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Nonetheless, this approach is also limiting, as it overlooks other significant actors. These include established middle powers and some of the world's most advanced economies, such as Japan and South Korea. Their leadership in technology, innovation-driven cultures, emphasis on foreign investment, and – in the case of South Korea – deepening strategic cooperation with the Czech Republic in energy, make them highly relevant non-European partners for Czech business and institutions alike.

It is also crucial to consider the growing importance of the region's emerging leaders – often labeled “Asian Tigers” or “Asian Dragons” – such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other ASEAN members. These countries are actively shaping the global stage through their economic and geopolitical trajectories. India stands out even more prominently, having positioned itself in recent years through its “Act East” policy and participation in forums like the G20. India is increasingly seen not only as a voice of the “Global South” but also as a key pole in the emerging multipolar world order.

We must not overlook Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan. With their “multi-vector” foreign policies (also referred to as “all-azimuth” strategies), they maintain active relations with Russia (their so-called “near abroad”), participate in China's Belt and Road projects, and engage with EU states. Their strategic location as transport hubs and rich deposits of critical raw materials make them vital global actors. All these countries are dynamically developing economies that are benefiting from Western strategies like decoupling, derisking, and “China Plus One” – presenting new business opportunities for European nations, including the Czech Republic.

The activities of the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) are therefore focused on understanding the political and economic complexities of this region – including, for example, so-called “bamboo diplomacy.” Our goal is to create a top-tier research center while also engaging in educational outreach, shaping public discourse, and providing expert support to Czech public institutions and businesses. Practical applicability and alignment with Czech national interests are our key priorities. Ultimately, the Center aims to contribute significant value within both the Czech and global arenas.

Jan Železný, Ph.D.

Executive Director



CAPS ADVISORY BOARD PRESENTATION



Jan Zahradil

Chairman of the Advisory Board / Senior Advisor /
Founder

Jan Zahradil is the founder and chairman of the CAPS Advisory Board. He began his political career in 1992 in the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia and later advised the Czech Prime Minister. He served in the Chamber of Deputies (1998–2004) and then spent twenty years as a Member of the European Parliament (2004–2024), the longest-serving Czech MEP, where he chaired the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) party from 2010 to 2020 and was the ECR's lead candidate for European Commission President in 2019, the first ever from Eastern Europe. As first vice-chair of the EP's international trade committee he was rapporteur on the EU–Vietnam free trade agreement and on the EU's Indo-Pacific trade and investment strategy. He co-chairs the Asian–European political forum of ICAPP.



Chung Eui-yong

Member of the Advisory Board

Chung Eui-yong is a South Korean diplomat and politician who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (2021–2022) and as the first Director of National Security in President Moon Jae-in's office (2017–2020).

A graduate of Seoul National University, he joined the foreign ministry in 1971 and served as ambassador to Israel (1997–1998), deputy trade minister (1998–2001), and ambassador to Korea's permanent mission to the UN and international organisations in Geneva (2001–2004). He was elected to the 17th National Assembly in 2004 and also served as Secretary-General of ICAPP.



George Yeo

Member of the Advisory Board

George Yeo is a former senior member of the Singaporean government who spent 23 years in office (1988–2011), holding the portfolios of Information and the Arts, Health, Trade and Industry, and Foreign Affairs. A President's Scholar, he studied engineering at Cambridge, graduating with a Double First, before a military career in which he rose to Brigadier-General and served as Chief of Staff of the Air Force. He later sat on the Vatican's commission reviewing the Holy See's economic-administrative structures (2013–2014) and on the Vatican's Council for the Economy (2014–2020).



Marina Shaikh

Member of the Advisory Board

Marina Shaikh is a philanthropist and the founder of The Rising World Foundation (RWF), which supports vulnerable communities in India with a focus on women's empowerment and basic healthcare – including food aid and medical supplies such as oxygen concentrators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She began her career in Brussels as a special assistant to former MEP Nirj Deva and later served as ACRE's director-general for India. Born in Indore and a graduate of National College in Mumbai, her humanitarian work has been recognised by The Times of India, The Free Press Journal, and the Governor of Kerala



Vít Vojta

Member of the Advisory Board

Vít Vojta is a sinologist, ethnologist and lawyer with thirty years' experience in economic and legal consulting on Asian markets, including China and Southeast Asia. He provides strategic advice and intercultural management to leading Central and Eastern European corporations such as Škoda Auto, VW Group, Robert Bosch, and PPF Group, and for over two decades has interpreted into Chinese for top state officials at state visits and international summits. He is the author of several books, including Čínský svět and Umění války v byznysu – a Czech translation of Sun Tzu's Art of War supplemented with chapters applying its theory to business environment.



Egemen Bağış, Ph.D.

Member of the Advisory Board

Egemen Bağış is a prominent figure in Turkish diplomacy and international relations. After studying in the USA, he returned to Turkey in 2002 and was elected MP for Istanbul. He served as chief foreign-policy advisor to the Prime Minister and then as State Minister and Turkey's chief negotiator for EU accession, later as Minister for EU Affairs.

He led the Transatlantic Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the Turkey-US parliamentary friendship group, and from 2019 to 2024 was Turkey's Ambassador to the Czech Republic. He is a member of the High-Level Advisory Council of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.



EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Since its launch, the Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) at CEVRO University has hosted a series of significant events underscoring its role as a platform for connecting Czech and European perspectives on the Asian region, including the official launch with former Singaporean Foreign Minister George Yeo discussing Asia-West relations, a lecture by former South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong on Korean Peninsula geopolitics, a book presentation on the Belt and Road Initiative by Dr. Mher Sahakyan, welcoming Indian philanthropist Marina Shaikh to the Advisory Board, expert debates on strategic partnerships with Central Asia featuring figures like Štefan Füle, and a discussion on Czech-Vietnamese relations with former Ambassador Hynek Kmoníček. In addition to these events, we also hosted a lecture featuring Vít Vojta, Roman Kodet, Elzbieta Pron, and Linda Piknerová, with whom you can find an interview in the next chapter.

Official Launch of CAPS and Visit by George Yeo

12th of September 2025

We have officially launched the Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) at CEVRO University. The launch was marked by a visit from George Yeo, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore and a prominent figure in Asian diplomacy.

In his lecture, George Yeo focused primarily on the evolving relationship between Asia and the West and the growing importance of China in the contemporary international system. He discussed China-US relations and stressed that, despite increasing strategic competition, it is important to preserve space for dialogue, trade, and mutual cooperation.

An important part of his remarks also addressed how the West perceives Asia and the importance of understanding the region's specific historical, cultural, and social context.

His visit thus provided a fitting starting point for one of the key areas CAPS intends to focus on in the long term: connecting Czech and European perspectives with a deeper understanding of the Asian environment and creating space for expert dialogue on the political, economic, and strategic issues shaping the region.

The event marked the first major public event hosted by our centre and provided an opportunity to introduce its main focus and ambitions. CAPS aims to contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic developments in the Asia-Pacific region, connect expert knowledge with the needs of the Czech public and private sectors, and create space for open discussion on issues that will increasingly shape Europe and the Czech Republic.



Korea: Current Geopolitical Challenges

1st of December 2025

CAPS hosted Chung Eui-yong, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Korea and a long-standing figure in South Korean diplomacy.

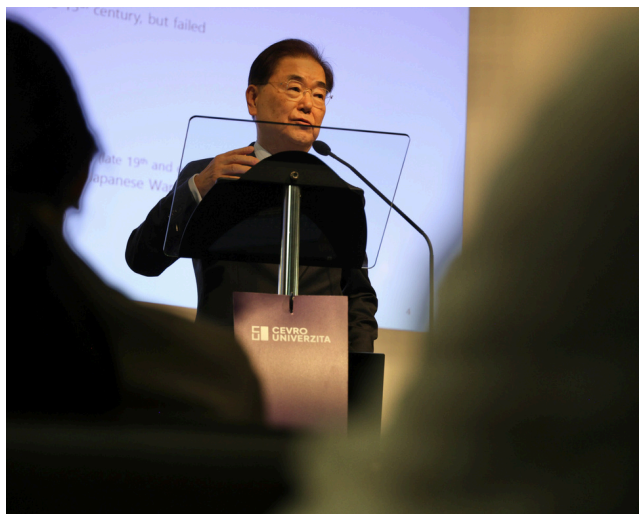
His lecture, Korea: Current Geopolitical Challenges focused on the current geopolitical and security situation on the Korean Peninsula and its wider regional context.

Chung Eui-yong shared his perspective on the security challenges facing the Korean Peninsula and the changing balance of power in East Asia. He also spoke about the close ties between the Czech Republic and South Korea, including the growing importance of economic cooperation and South Korean investment in the Czech Republic.

The discussion was moderated by Jan Zahradil, founder of CAPS and Chair of its Advisory Board.

The event provided an opportunity to hear directly from a highly experienced South Korean diplomat and to discuss developments in a region that is becoming increasingly important for European and Czech foreign and security policy.

The event followed the launch of CAPS and reflected one of the centre's main areas of interest: bringing greater attention to political and security developments in the Asia-Pacific region and creating opportunities for dialogue between Czech and Asian perspectives.



Mher Sahakyan Presented a Book on the Belt and Road Initiative

11th of December 2025

CAPS at CEVRO University hosted the official presentation of the newly published Routledge Handbook of China's Belt and Road Initiative in Eurasia. The event featured a visit by Dr. Mher Sahakyan, the editor of the book and an internationally recognized expert on Eurasian geopolitics.

In his lecture, Dr. Sahakyan focused primarily on an in-depth analysis of China's Belt and Road Initiative within the context of the entire Eurasian continent and the transformation of the international system towards multipolarity.

He discussed the geopolitical and economic impacts of this strategy, emphasizing that today's great powers are not only competing for spheres of influence in the traditional sense, but are also fighting for dominance in the digital space and control over high-tech supply chains.

An important part of his speech also addressed the Eurasian continent's need to attract real investments in transport and infrastructure, which are key to economic development.

His visit provided a fitting starting point for one of the key areas CAPS has long focused on: connecting prominent academic figures from various parts of the world and creating a space for understanding different historical experiences. The discussion was moderated by CAPS Director Dr. Jan Železný. This event provided an opportunity to present the book, which also features contributions from CAPS experts Dr. Jan Železný and Dr. Zdeněk Rod.



Marina Shaikh joins the CAPS Advisory Board

15th of January 2026

In January 2026, CAPS welcomed Marina Shaikh, Indian philanthropist and founder of The Rising World Foundation, as a new member of its Advisory Board.

During her visit to CEVRO University, Shaikh spoke about her work in India and the challenges facing local communities, with a focus on education, women's empowerment, and access to technology. She also presented the work of her foundation, which supports disadvantaged children and women through a range of social and educational programmes.

Her involvement brings a valuable Indian perspective to CAPS and strengthens the centre's focus on Czech-Indian relations. It also creates new opportunities to explore India's development, growing international role, and the links between its economic progress and wider social challenges.



Dr. Elzbieta Pron Delivered a Lecture on the Future of the EU's Global Gateway in Central Asia at CEVRO University

23rd February 2026

On Monday, 23 February, a lecture entitled Central Asia as a Partner: Reality and the Future of the EU Global Gateway Initiative in the Region took place at CEVRO University in Prague.

The main guest of the event was Dr. Elzbieta Pron from the University of Silesia in Katowice, an expert on China's foreign policy and Central Asian politics, who visited Prague at the invitation of the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS).

„Global Gateway is clearly a response to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The main challenge in Central Asia is not the region itself, but the geopolitical consequences of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which disrupted infrastructure and limited connectivity options for both China and the EU.

Interestingly, both initiatives now follow very similar paths, particularly through the Caspian corridor, and both emphasise digital and modern infrastructure development. The key difference lies in implementation: China operates quickly and pragmatically, while the European Union must follow stricter transparency and regulatory standards. This makes the EU approach more complex – and often less flexible – than China's model,” Dr. Pron emphasised.

The lecture was followed by an expert discussion with students and faculty members, focusing on the future trajectory of EU–Central Asia relations and the measurable indicators of Global Gateway's effectiveness in the coming years.



Dr. Roman Kodet Spoke About the Challenges of Japanese Geopolitics

11th March 2026

On Wednesday, March 11, a lecture titled “Challenges of Japanese Geopolitics in Historical Context” took place at CEVRO University in Prague. The main guest of the event was Dr. Roman Kodet, a historian from the Faculty of Arts at the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS). In his presentation, he focused on the deep historical roots of current security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

In his lecture, Dr. Kodet analyzed the complex dynamics of relations between Japan and its neighbors, particularly South Korea and China, placing them within the broader framework of a sinocentric worldview and Confucian hierarchy. He paid special attention to the transformation of Japan’s security policy, which—under the pressure of a changing global environment—is moving away from decades of restraint toward a significant strengthening of its own defense capabilities.

Dr. Kodet emphasized that the United States remains the key pillar of Japan’s security, providing the country with a nuclear umbrella. However, this partnership is undergoing a stress test, especially in the era of a second Trump administration. Japan finds itself in a paradoxical situation: Donald Trump criticizes Tokyo for low defense spending, even though Japan’s armed forces are constrained by a constitution drafted by the United States after World War II. In response, the Kishida government committed in 2022 to a historic doubling of defense spending by 2030. Japan is increasingly aware that in the event of a conflict in Europe or the Middle East, U.S. assistance may no longer be guaranteed.

The lecture also highlighted that, from a Eurocentric perspective, China is often emphasized as Japan's primary challenger, while South Korea is seen as a natural ally of Tokyo. However, historical legacies and economic rivalry create barriers that are difficult to overcome. An interesting aspect is the historical dispute over hierarchy within the Confucian order, in which Korea traditionally viewed itself as culturally superior and closer to the Chinese center than Japan—an attitude that continues to shape mutual distrust.



How Do Asian Powers Operate in Africa? It Is About More Than Just Raw Materials! CAPS Welcomed Africanist Dr. Linda Piknerová

13th April 2026

On Monday, 13 April, the Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) held another event in its series of expert debates, this time focusing on the role of Asian powers in Africa. The main guest was Africa specialist Dr. Linda Piknerová.

The lecture offered a pragmatic perspective on the current environment across the African continent, examining the vast scale of Chinese integration, the historical footprint of North Korean architecture, and the strategic opportunities available to both international and Czech investors.

Dr. Piknerová emphasized that, in order to succeed in Africa, Czech exporters must abandon one-size-fits-all approaches and focus on stable countries such as South Africa, Benin, or Morocco. While China is pursuing massive and long-term integration on the continent, including the relocation of entire families and the construction of infrastructure, the Czech Republic, according to the expert, has a unique strategic advantage in the form of a “clean slate,” unburdened by a colonial past.

Rather than competing with billion-dollar foreign capital, Czech companies should therefore concentrate on highly specialized technologies, for example in water management, and build on the strong historical reputation of Czechoslovak industry. A crucial condition for success in these markets, where the influence of Middle Eastern states is also set to grow and Russian destabilization will continue, is a lasting physical presence, the cultivation of informal personal relationships on the ground, and support for economic diplomacy.



The Czech Republic and Central Asia: A Partnership for the 21st Century

14th of May 2026

CAPS at CEVRO University organized an expert debate focusing on strategic relations with Central Asian countries. The guests were Radek Vondráček, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies; Štefan Füle, former European Commissioner; and Milan Sedláček, Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Azerbaijan.

In his remarks, Štefan Füle primarily focused on the European Union's changing approach to this region and its growing geopolitical significance. He discussed how Central Asia is no longer a peripheral issue but is becoming one of the key strategic regions to which the EU is devoting the same systematic attention it previously reserved mainly for candidate countries.

An important part of his reflections was directed at the future development of the region, which sits at the crossroads of influence from the EU, the Eurasian Economic Union, and China's Belt and Road Initiative. He emphasized that Central Asian states should maintain their own autonomy and strive for balanced, economically beneficial cooperation with all actors.

The discussion was moderated by Jan Zahradil, Founder of CAPS and Chairman of the CAPS Advisory Board. The event provided an opportunity to hear directly from experienced diplomats and discuss developments in a region that is increasingly important for European foreign policy.

The panel discussion was followed by an open debate with students and the academic community.



Czechia and Vietnam: Past, Present, Future

23rd of June 2026

CAPS at CEVRO University organized a panel discussion dedicated to the development and prospects of Czech-Vietnamese relations. The panel featured former Ambassador of the Czech Republic to Vietnam Hynek Kmoníček, Chairman of the Association of Czech Citizens of Vietnamese Origin Cong Tu Pham, and Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade Jan Sechter.

In his contribution, Hynek Kmoníček focused mainly on the specifics of the current strategic partnership. He discussed the paradox of close cooperation between a NATO member state and communist Vietnam, describing this relationship as a deep, stable partnership where, after many years of cooperation, both sides know exactly what to expect from each other.

A significant part of the debate was also devoted to economic opportunities, specifically the need to diversify Czech exports to Vietnam over the next decade so that they are not concentrated primarily on the defense industry.

Introductory remarks were delivered by CAPS Director Dr. Jan Železný and the Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, H.E. Dương Hoài Nam. The panel was moderated by CAPS Advisory Board Chairman Jan Zahradil, creating an ideal space for an expert dialogue on economic challenges. This event demonstrated that Czech-Vietnamese relations are entering a new stage in which innovation and interpersonal contacts are gaining importance alongside traditional diplomacy.



Where Does the West Go Wrong in Researching China? CAPS Welcomed Dr Emilia Szwajnoch from the University of Silesia

8th September 2026

On Tuesday, 8 September, the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) held another lecture in its expert series at CEVRO University in Prague, this time examining how and where the West goes wrong in researching and understanding China. The keynote speaker was Dr. Emilia Szwajnoch from the University of Silesia in Katowice.

In her lecture, Dr Szwajnoch focused on Western concerns about China's human rights record and its use of modern technologies to monitor and control the population. However, she drew attention to an important distinction: while China is an authoritarian state, this does not mean that everything it does is inherently authoritarian.

As an illustrative case study of a phenomenon that is often misunderstood in the West, she examined China's social credit system. According to Dr Szwajnoch, its portrayal in the West tends to be overly simplistic, whereas the reality is considerably more complex. She subsequently demonstrated how inaccurate reporting on the subject differs among Western think tanks, academic institutions and the media. She emphasised that distorted information is frequently repeated uncritically through a chain of secondary sources. This process may ultimately lead to flawed political and economic decisions.

The lecture thus offered a more measured perspective on one of the most frequently cited examples of China's digital surveillance.



CAPS INTERVIEW



Africa's Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Potential with Dr. Linda Piknerová

The CAPS hosted a lecture on the activities of Asian powers in Africa by Dr. Linda Piknerová, an Africa specialist. Below is an interview offering a deeper insight into the contemporary environment across the African continent, Chinese integration, and strategic opportunities for Czech exporters. Dr. Piknerová spoke to our analyst Jan Vavřík.

From a geopolitical and geoeconomic perspective, which African states or regions currently offer the most promising investment opportunities, and what sectors are primarily driving this growth?

The African continent consists of 54 distinct states and several diametrically different regions; therefore, it cannot be viewed as a homogeneous entity. Success always depends on the specific product or service an entity wishes to introduce to the market, whether it is agriculture, the defense industry, or tech startups.

However, if we were to identify the states with the greatest potential, I would include the Republic of South Africa. It has a double taxation avoidance agreement signed with the Czech Republic, possesses a stable diplomatic mission, and has a strong background.

The legal environment here is relatively predictable, and the Anglophone market lowers the barriers to entry. Cape Town, for instance, is currently profiling itself as a highly attractive hub for global tech startups. In West Africa, Francophone Benin can be considered a growing opportunity.

Although often overlooked in Europe, it offers a higher degree of political stability and institutional viability than neighboring Nigeria. It also boasts effectively functioning industrial zones. In North Africa, Morocco plays a key role, standing out with its developed infrastructure and strategic logistical accessibility, while offering a more stable business environment compared to surrounding countries.

Focusing on Central European, or more specifically, Czech companies, what can they enter these markets with? What is their comparative advantage over competition from the US, Asia, or Western Europe?

Our fundamental advantage lies in our historical and diplomatic profile. Unlike the French, British, or Belgians, the Czech Republic does not carry a colonial past, which to this day acts as a strong negative trigger in many African states. The absence of the status of a former colonizer is a very potent diplomatic and business argument.

At the same time, we can benefit from our historical presence dating back to the Cold War. Czechoslovakia had been active in Africa since the 1950s and left a deep footprint there. We built breweries in Ethiopia, and we developed the manufacturing and footwear industries in Ghana, where machines from Svit are still functioning today. We have earned an excellent reputation that we can build upon.

A specific and highly promising sector is water management. The Czech hydrogeological mapping of Ethiopia or current projects for water purification and desalination in West Africa are prime examples of where our expertise finds essential application on the continent.

How should we view the activities of China in this context, given that its economic expansion in Africa is frequently discussed? Does it represent an insurmountable competition for European efforts?

The Chinese investment strategy operates on a completely different scale, involving massive capital allocation and extensive infrastructure projects with which the Czech Republic cannot compete in terms of capacity. China saturates the market with capital and concrete.

However, our goal should not be trying to match this model, but rather strategically benefiting from it. Our presence should be complementary. The fact that China is investing heavily in a given country does not preclude us from offering highly specialized technological solutions for particular problems.

To illustrate the geopolitical diversity of the continent, it is also worth mentioning Eswatini, the last African state that formally resists Chinese pressure and maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

In expert discussions, you often emphasize that European actors encounter difficulties due to a misunderstanding of local business customs. Where do you see the biggest obstacle to successful expansion?

The biggest barriers are our own deeply ingrained stereotypes and reliance on European corporate models. The African market requires a continuous, physical presence and the maintenance of intensive personal ties. The notion that business can be managed asynchronously via emails sent from Prague is illusory. The key tool of commercial diplomacy and the daily agenda is personal contact and platforms like WhatsApp. Communication here is constant; it demands immediate reactions and the blending of formal and informal relationships, including shared dinners and spending time in the local environment. If an investor does not accept this sociocultural aspect of doing business, they have no chance of lasting success in that market.

Looking at the future development of the African continent over the next decade, which geopolitical players do you think will strengthen their influence the most?

We are seeing a gradual shift in the approach of the United States, which is beginning to fully realize the strategic importance of Africa. Much more dynamic, however, are the states of the Middle East like Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Their approach is highly effective. They are unburdened by colonialism, possess a religious affinity with parts of the continent, and their representatives are physically present at every African Union summit, where they proactively offer investments and knowledge transfers in sectors like energy. The European Union often merely looks on passively in this regard.

However, the Russian Federation is also applying its strategy in Africa. Can its approach be compared to that of Asian or Middle Eastern states?

The Russian approach is completely different because Russia lacks the economic capacity to build classical influence through investments. Instead, it applies an asymmetric strategy. It primarily focuses on providing security services through paramilitary structures, such as the Africa Corps, especially to governments in the Sahel region that have rejected Western intervention. In parallel, Russia is conducting massive propaganda and information operations. The goal is to erode Western influence and destabilize the region, which could lead to further migration waves to Europe, and discredit Western models to such an extent that it leads to the severing of standard trade ties. An example of this information strategy is the opening of a foreign editorial office for the Sputnik network right in Addis Ababa, the center of the African Union, from where Russian narratives are spread by local journalists.

We greatly appreciate your time and the deep insights you have shared regarding the complex business and geopolitical landscape across the African continent.

I was happy to do it. Thank you for having me.

RECENT CAPS RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

CAPS Analysts Presented Their Research at the International Lodz East Asia Meeting in Poland

June 2026

Members of the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS), Dr Jan Železný and Dr Zdeněk Rod, represented CEVRO University at the 19th annual Lodz East Asia Meeting (LEAM), an international conference organised by the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of International and Political Studies of the University of Lodz in Poland.

CAPS Executive Director Dr. Jan Železný and his colleague Dr. Elżbieta Proń from the University of Silesia in Katowice presented the findings of their research into Sino-Kazakh cooperation in the space sector.

They focused primarily on the scope, depth and nature of this cooperation and how it fits into the two countries' broader foreign-policy and geopolitical concepts. Drawing on the concept of heterarchy, they placed the policies of Beijing and Astana within a broader context of power relations, explained the role of space programmes in advancing the national interests of both countries, and identified the principal areas of cooperation.

In the case of China, they examined the Space Silk Road programme as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. They demonstrated that Kazakhstan serves as China's principal partner in the strategically important region of Central Asia. Cooperation focuses on research, personnel exchanges and, above all, the use of China's BeiDou satellite navigation system and participation in the prestigious International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) project, which aims to establish a research station on the Moon.

Kazakhstan is therefore regarded as an important actor within the Global South, although the scope of cooperation remains limited, despite growing contacts between the private sectors of both countries in recent years. For Kazakhstan, China is a partner that supports domestic development within the framework of its multi-vector foreign policy, facilitates technology transfer and provides access to other countries of the Global South. Most importantly, however, cooperation with China helps Astana balance Russian influence as part of its hedging strategy.

Kazakhstan continues to cooperate with Russia through the Baiterek programme, which aims to modernise the Baikonur Cosmodrome. At the same time, in line with the concept of heterarchy, Kazakhstan also plays an important role in European space systems. The full study will be published in the prestigious US–Korean journal *Asian Perspective*, published by Johns Hopkins University Press in cooperation with Kyungnam University.

CAPS Head of Research Dr Zdeněk Rod subsequently presented online his research project conducted at CEVRO University, which examines changes in Czech foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific between 1993 and 2025.

The project seeks to establish whether the Czech Republic has primarily deepened its relations with pro-Western democratic partners, or whether the political and ideological orientation of individual governments has played only a marginal role, with engagement instead driven mainly by pragmatic interests.

Dr. Rod classified individual governments, together with overlapping presidential terms, as value-oriented—emphasising democracy, human rights and the rule of law—pragmatic, with a focus on trade and the national interest, or unclassifiable. He subsequently applied this framework to an extensive dataset covering 40 countries, four subregions and 516 coded items, including documents, official visits, declarations and participation in regional projects.

The preliminary findings indicate that pragmatism has played a relatively prominent role in Czech foreign policy. On the one hand, the Czech Republic maintains good relations with democratic countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and India, with which it also conducts significant trade. On the other hand, although diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China remain stagnant, trade with China continues to dominate Czech commercial relations across the region.

At the same time, the Czech Republic is developing a strategic partnership with Vietnam, accompanied by growing bilateral trade.

The research therefore suggests that Czech foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific has lacked coherence over the past three decades and has been only partially shaped by ideology, depending largely on the government in office. For example, the previous government of Petr Fiala pursued a strongly values-based approach, particularly in its relations with Taiwan, whereas Andrej Babiš's first and second governments favoured a more pragmatic foreign policy. These differing approaches are consequently reflected in the implementation of Czech foreign policy towards partners across the Indo-Pacific.



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ASTROPOLITICS · CENTRAL ASIA · GREAT-POWER COMPETITION

Sino-Kazakh Cooperation along the **Space Silk Road**

*Trajectories of development and implications for the balance of power in
Central Asia*

Jan Železný, Ph.D. – Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS)
CEVRO University, Czechia

Elżbieta Proń, Ph.D. – Institute of Political Sciences
University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

LEAM 2026

PRAGMATISM · VALUES · MULTIPOLARITY

Between Pragmatism and Values Czech Foreign Policy toward the Indo-Pacific in a Multipolar World

Zdeněk Rod

Assistant Professor · Department of Security Studies
CEVRO University, Prague, Czech Republic

Dr. Zdenek Rod Published a New Book on Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

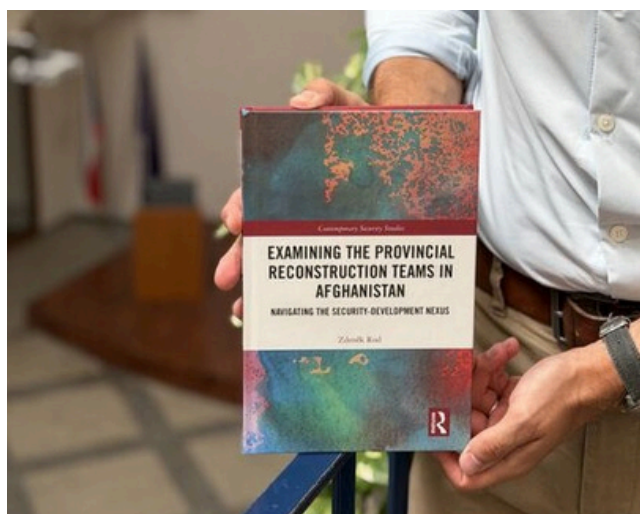
August 2026

Dr. Zdeněk Rod has published a new academic monograph, *Examining the Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Navigating the Security – Development Nexus*, with the prestigious British academic publisher Routledge as part of its Contemporary Security Studies series.

The book examines how Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) sought to stabilise Afghanistan's provinces between 2002 and 2015 by combining security operations with reconstruction and development activities.

Drawing on an extensive body of academic and policy literature, as well as interviews with practitioners and representatives of NATO member states, the publication demonstrates that each country adapted the security–development nexus to its own priorities – with widely varying results. The author connects theory with practice, explaining why development strategies frequently failed in high-risk environments and why sometimes rigid military structures struggled to support civilian objectives.

The book also introduces a new analytical framework for studying civil–military missions, grounded in a theoretical understanding of the security–development nexus. Its findings remain relevant to contemporary peacebuilding and crisis–management operations. Through detailed case studies, the monograph challenges universalist approaches to reconstruction and demonstrates why understanding the balance between security and development is essential to rebuilding post–conflict societies.



Dr. Jan Železný Presented His Research at an International Chinese Studies Conference in England

September 2026

The Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) at CEVRO University operates not only as a think tank but also conducts its own research.

Its work has an international reach, as demonstrated in the first week of September by CAPS Executive Director Dr. Jan Železný.

Together with his colleague Dr. Elżbieta Proń from the University of Silesia in Katowice, he presented the findings of their research into Sino-Kazakh cooperation in the space sector.

Their presentation formed part of the British Association for Chinese Studies (BACS) Annual Conference 2026, hosted by the prestigious Lancaster University in northern England.

In their study, Železný and Proń focused primarily on the scope, depth and nature of this cooperation and how it fits into the two countries' broader foreign-policy and geopolitical concepts.

Drawing on the concept of heterarchy, they placed the policies of Beijing and Astana within a broader context of power relations, explained the role of space programmes in advancing the national interests of both countries, and identified the principal areas of cooperation.

In the case of China, they examined the Space Silk Road programme as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. They demonstrated that Kazakhstan serves as China's principal partner in the strategically important region of Central Asia.

Cooperation focuses on research, personnel exchanges and, above all, the use of China's BeiDou satellite navigation system and participation in the prestigious International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) project, which aims to establish a research station on the Moon.

Kazakhstan is therefore regarded as an important actor within the Global South, although the scope of cooperation remains limited, despite growing contacts between the private sectors of both countries in recent years.

For Kazakhstan, China is a partner that supports domestic development within the framework of its multi-vector foreign policy, facilitates technology transfer and provides access to other countries of the Global South.

Most importantly, however, cooperation with China helps Astana balance Russian influence as part of its hedging strategy.

Kazakhstan continues to cooperate with Russia through the Baiterek programme, which aims to modernise the Baikonur Cosmodrome. At the same time, in line with the concept of heterarchy, Kazakhstan also plays an important role in European space systems.



PREVIOUS EVENTS

CAPS Bid Farewell to the South Korean Ambassador

In July 2026, Jan Zahradil, Chairman of the CAPS Advisory Board, and Dr Jan Železný, Executive Director of CAPS, accepted an invitation from H.E. Hong Yongki, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, to visit the South Korean Embassy.

During the meeting, they reviewed cooperation between CAPS and the Embassy and discussed the future development of the close relationship between the Czech Republic and South Korea, particularly in business and higher education.

The two CAPS representatives also wished Ambassador Hong every success in his future professional endeavours as he concluded his diplomatic mission in the Czech Republic. They thanked him for his contribution to strengthening relations with CEVRO University.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Trade Policy Day 2026: "Is the EU-India Trade Agreement an Opportunity for Czech SMEs?" Conference on EU-India trade relations and opportunities for Czech business

We are pleased to invite you to the conference "Is the EU-India Trade Agreement an Opportunity for Czech SMEs?", organised by the Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS) and the Center for Economic Studies (CES) at CEVRO University. The conference will be held as a partner event of the European Commission's Trade Policy Day 2026.

The discussion will focus on the forthcoming Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the European Union and India, which could be a game changer for Czech small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The conference aims to give Czech businesses a practical head start. With only a few months remaining, companies need to prepare for India's distant, dynamic and complex market, establish key contacts and turn the forthcoming agreement into a competitive advantage.

The conference will bring together strategic and practical perspectives on EU-India trade relations and the role of Czech companies in the changing global trading environment.

Among other topics, it will explore how Czech businesses can better understand the Indian market, prepare for its specific conditions and find reliable local partners.

Speakers will include H.E. Raveesh Kumar, Ambassador of India to the Czech Republic, and H.E. Eliška Žigová, Czech diplomat and former Ambassador of the Czech Republic to India, who will share insights from her diplomatic posting in the country.

The event will also bring together representatives of Czech public institutions, the business community and the Czech-Indian Chamber of Commerce.

Further details about the programme and speakers will be announced soon.

 Date: 14 October 2026 at 14:00

 Venue: Atrium, CEVRO University, Jungmannova 17, Prague 1

The event will be held in Czech and English.

We look forward to welcoming you.

Register:

- <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeaY3duXSJmcqJrqELzw4DX1nNfPrIhB1VYUDBV3x66ERDqkg/viewform>



14 October
14:00

CEVRO University
Jungmannova 17
Prague 1



Registration:
caps@cevro.cz

Is the EU-India Trade Agreement an Opportunity for Czech SMEs?

The conference will be held as a partner event of the European Commission's Trade Policy Day.

Organized by the **Center for Asia-Pacific Studies (CAPS)** and the **Center for Economic Studies (CES)** at CEVRO University.

Speakers:

H.E. Raveesh Kumar, Ambassador of India to the Czech Republic

H.E. Eliška Žigová, Czech diplomat and former Ambassador of the Czech Republic to India

The event will also include representatives of Czech public institutions, the business sector, and the Czech-Indian Chamber of Commerce.

Organizers:



Under the auspices of:



European
Commission

CAPS IN THE MEDIA

Dr. Jan Železný and Sandra Burdová on U.S.-China race in building space data centers for Info.cz:

<https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi-a-komentare/datacentra-vesmir-spacex-cina-ai-satelite>

Dr. Jan Železný on China's political system and the global role of BRICS for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1260782-studio-24-zatajuje-pekings-tav-prezidenta-analytik-vysvetluje-povod-spekulacii>

Dr. Zdeněk Rod on the economic impact of the instability in the Persian Gulf for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1259173-studio-24-riesenim-moze-byt-vystavba-novych-ropovodov-odbornik-rod-o-situacii-na-blizkom-vychode>

Jan Vavřík on the history and future of Hong Kong for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1254689-studio-24-odkedy-cina-kontroluje-hongkong-kapital-sa-zacal-prelievat-do-singapuru-tvrdi-odbornik>

Kateřina Kovács on the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for Český rozhlas Plus:

<https://program.rozhlas.cz/zaznamy#/plus/2026-08-31>

Dr. Jan Železný on the U.S.-South Korea relationship for TV Nova:

<https://tn.nova.cz/zpravodajstvi/clanek/654803-trump-omezi-cviceni-s-jihokorejci-mam-dobry-vztah-s-kim-cong-unem-vysvetlil>

Dr. Jan Železný and Jan Malina on Canada's effort to increase exports to Asia for Info.cz:

<https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi-a-komentare/kanada-carney-ropa-asie-trump>

Jan Vavřík on the relations between U.S. and DPRK for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1247480-preco-trump-opaet-lichoti-kim-cong-unovi-v-hre-moze-byt-superenie-s-cinou>

Dr. Jan Železný on Putin's visit to the Kuril Islands for Český rozhlas Plus:

<https://www.mujirozhlas.cz/zive/plus?autoplay=1>

Dr. Jan Železný on the U.S. competition with China in chips for Info.cz:

<https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi-a-komentare/trump-cipy-statni-kapitalismus-cina>

Dr. Jan Železný on the EU-China trade relations for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/analyzy-24/1237760-analyzy-24-rizika-koketovania-s-cinou>

Dr. Jan Železný on the escalation of tensions around Taiwan for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1237162-studio-24-cina-stupnuje-tlak-na-taiwan>

Dr. Jan Železný on China's AI research and development for Info.cz:

<https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi-a-komentare/cina-ai-globalni-jih-zapad>

Kateřina Kovács on the economic importance of the South China Sea for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1245129-studio-24-napaetie-v-juhocinskom-mori>

Daniela Finkousová on a shooting in the Thai school for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1243772-studio-24-sok-v-thajsku-po-skolskom-masakri>

Jan Vavřík on the relations between Armenia and Russia for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1218813-studio-24-moskva-a-jerevan-na-razcesti>

Dr. Jan Železný and Jan Malina on the China Shock 2.0 for Info.cz:

<https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi-a-komentare/cina-evropa-prumysl-deindustrializace>

Jan Vavřík on Japan's military build-up for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1242922-studio-24-kimova-sestra-sa-vyhraza-toku>

Daniela Finkousová on the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1241988-studio-24-napaetie-medzi-islamabadom-a-kabulom>

Jan Vavřík on the earthquake in Japan for Joj24:

<https://joj24.noviny.sk/studio-joj-24/1240109-ako-sa-japonci-vyrovnavaju-so-silnymi-zemetraseniami-disciplina-a-priprava-uz-od-detstva>

Dr. Jan Železný and Jan Malina on the state of the Chinese economy for Info.cz:

<https://www.info.cz/zpravodajstvi-a-komentare/cina-ekonomika-usa-americky-kapitalismus-cinsky-rust>

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