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Switzerland “Stays” in Europe

Katarína Lokšová, Michal Vít

On Sunday 8th February a plebiscite on expanding free movement of persons to new EU members (Bulgaria and Romania) took place in Switzerland. By a majority of 59,6 %, the Swiss voters have supported free movement of EU citizens in Switzerland with only four cantons voting against.

There are several reasons for this decision. The Union and Switzerland have a rather unusual mutual agreement which includes the so-called guillotine clause which enables the EU to cancel all its agreements with Switzerland (including economic ones) in case Switzerland denies free movement to its citizens in a referendum. A related reason why a majority of the Swiss has decided to vote “yes” is the considerable dependence on trade relations with EU members. Also a great part of Swiss qualified workforce comes from the EU. Despite that Brussels feared the referendum’s outcome could be negative. In the time of a financial crisis, opening to foreign workers is a largely unpopular measure.

The biggest political party, right-oriented SVP (Schweizerische Volkspartei) launched a quite aggressive campaign against the expansion of free movement to Bulgaria and Romania. It argued that both countries are poor which will lead to an influx of migrants to the already overcrowded Switzerland. Despite the campaign whose symbol were black crows tearing Switzerland in pieces, most Swiss have decided based on the positives of good relations with the EU. However, situation in the country remains tense.

Naturally, the EU has welcomed the results. Czech PM Mirek Topolánek as the chief of the presiding country stated: “Especially in a time when voices calling for new forms of protectionism

can be heard in the EU, it is important that a non-member country has decided to share one of the basic common liberties.” However hypocrisy of a number of member countries is apparent – they have not opened their work markets to Romanians and Bulgarians.

Economy and the Limits of Czech Presidency’s Possibilities

(An excerpt from an analysis published at PREDESDNICTVI.CZ)

Ivan Kováč

The Czech Republic has chosen the “3Es” as its priority. These share two common features: recency and urgency. Notably the crisis development in the fields of economy and energy has had a truly devastating impact and menaces not only EU’s economy but also its inhabitants. What can the Czech presidency do in such a situation?

The economic crisis which fully developed in autumn is a topic which employs every government and every EU member country without exception. The ideological inclinations of European governments vary and so do their “guaranteed recipes” and proposals for the solution of this crisis. The left talks about an emergency situation in which extraordinary social, compensational and stimulating expenses are needed. The right on the other hand is trying hard to keep government expenses, burdened by the crisis, reasonable and thus prevent a huge deficit and growing public debt. However everyone agrees that orthodox economic neoliberalism is not fit for this crisis and that government interventions in the economy are absolutely inevitable.

Without inclining to one or another of the above mentioned alternatives it is evident that a solution of the economic crisis is mainly in the hands of governments of individual EU member countries. A common union platform in the form of the European Economic Recovery Plan which was adopted in December 2008 can provide space “only” for the designation of basic framework of priorities and in case of need serve as a tool and clue for government economic rescue packages. [Analysis continues here](#) (in Czech only)

Guantánamo Troubles Relations with New American President

Karel Ulík

Soon after he assumed power American President Obama made important steps towards the closure of the controversial penitentiary in Guantánamo, which was opened in 2002 in the framework of war on terrorism. However the question of what to do with those prisoners that cannot be accused of any crime is still in the air. About 60 of them cannot return to their countries of origin where they would face persecution. Obama has not officially asked his European partners to accept the prisoners, however diplomatical talks on prisoners’transfer to allied countries was commenced during the previous administration.

EU’s response is mixed. At the beginning of February, European Parliament called on member countries to respond positively to a possible American request and enable persons from Guantánamo to stay on their soil. The President of the European Commission Barroso expressed similar opinion. A coordinated approach which was advocated by a part of the Council has not

been reached yet. Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Finland or Hungary belong to the countries that are rather in favour. At the end of February these issues will be discussed by the Council for justice and interior and three weeks later an EU delegation will leave for Washington to discuss Guantánamo with the Commissioner on justice, freedom and safety Barrot and Czech Minister of Interior Langer at head. Perhaps a bit surprisingly so far the Czech stance has been rather reserved. "First I would ask the US how many they are going to accept. They caught them so let them take care of them." Schwarzenberg said in Brussels. The Czech Republic's answer to the possible request will depend on concrete conditions.

A sobering from exaggerated expectations after Obama's entrance is needed for mutual relations. American requests for help with closing down this prison or increasing activity in Afghanistan are not met with too much enthusiasm. However transatlantic relations will not straighten on their own and only from one of the ocean's shores. If Europe wants US support in approach towards fight on climate change then it should be more open to matters which are important to the other side.

Comments on Recent News

EU's Strongest Economy Appoints New Economy Minister

At the age of 37 years, CSU politician Karl-Theodor Freiherr von und zu Guttenberg is the youngest person at this post ever. He was nominated after the resignation of his predecessor who allegedly left due to his age. The nomination of this lawyer was not troublefree. Even from his own party voices saying he is a "good man at a bad place" could be heard, notably because up to now he has been dealing with foreign policy topics rather than economy. He is the person who proposed to give Turkey "privileged partnership" instead of full EU membership.

Turkish PM in Davos

The question of Turkey was opened again a few days ago. The walkout of Turkish PM Erdogan at the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he attacked Israeli President is by some viewed as a move to please his voters, however that does not change anything about its potential dangerousness. According to German Spiegel antisemitism in Turkey is on the rise which compromises its position of a neutral mediator. The weekly Economist cites an anonymous European diplomat as saying: "What (the Davos spat) does leave in Europe is the feeling that Mr. Erdogan is unpredictable."

Russia: Wounded Bear Makes Itself Heard

Before the economic crisis broke out in full, media were full of articles describing Russia as a country which re-discovers its self-confidence, or more poetically as a bear which is waking up from winter sleep. But it seems that the bear was not careful enough outdoors and let the crisis take it by surprise. Even though Russia plays it tough on the outside and boasts that it can sustain itself, domestic situation is different – the ruble loses value, inflation is around 13% p.a. and the dwindling prices of oil do not help either.

A starving animal is always irritable and unpredictable and Russian bear is no exception. The Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov has stated a few days ago that the Czech Republic

belongs to Eastern Europe. Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg later commented: "Of course that we are in Central Europe. Asserting that we are in Eastern Europe stems from the post-war alignment not that we would enroll voluntarily. By his comment Lavrov wanted to remind of the fact that all countries of the former Warsaw pact had belonged to the Eastern bloc." It might seem that this was just a toothless remark through which Russians try to commemorate times that are long gone. However every such reminiscence is dangerous and we have to stand up to such remarks just like Schwarzenberg did.

Interviews

"We live above the standards. We acknowledge it but we don't do anything about it. It seems that all governments underestimate the crisis and think that they can more or less continue, change only their future approach and not look back or even say where they made a mistake. But I would probably ask whether this crisis is just another small crisis which we will sort out somehow or whether this is the crisis which will change the Western civilization or whether it means that it will discontinue the civilization? That is a terrible question."

Erik Best, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 10th February 2009. [Complete interview](#)

"Even though I respect Karel Schwarzenberg very much, I was disappointed by some of his reactions to the recent conflict in the Gaza strip. For example in the European Parliament he recently stated that "it is quite common that humanitarian law is breached in war conflicts" (quotation according to Agence Europe, January 20, 2009). Breaching of humanitarian law is a sad reality of war conflicts, however it should not be played down by high government representatives in such a way."

Marek Čejka, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 8th February 2009. [Complete interview](#)

"A coordinated approach towards Guantánamo prisoners would probably be quite complicated. Here possibilities of individual EU countries which have certain experience with prisoners' region (colonial past), will matter more. It is crucial to clear the prisoners' status from international law point of view and the possibilities of a trial. I am not sure that the presidential country can markedly coordinate this. The problem of the current government is that it has been non-critical towards the George W. Bush administrative and that it has never even with the subtlest diplomatic language hinted its reservations in what concerns detention and torture."

Vladimíra Dvořáková, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 14th February 2009. [Complete interview](#)

"Commentaries on this year's crisis fail to underline that supplies of Russian gas through Ukraine to Europe on January 7 were not halted by Ukrainian Naftogaz, Russian Gazprom, RosUkrEnerg or force majeure. The order to stop deliveries was given personally by PM Vladimir Putin on the eve of January 7. It was a political decision which had nothing to do with economic categories such as price of gas, tariffs or debt due date. It is apparent that consequences were supposed to be felt namely by European countries which at first were not a side of the dispute. However they have unwillingly become hostages. It has therefore been fully shown how distant is legal culture and

awareness in some of former USSR countries, even among the elites, from the principles and norms which rule trade relations in the developed world."

Jan Šír, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 15th February 2009. [Complete interview](#)

Interesting Publications

Centre for European Policy Studies

In their paper "[The Rise of China: Policies of the EU, Russia and the US](#)" the three authors write about different powers' approach towards China. In what concerns the EU, D. Gros points out to the fact that apart from trade and soon also environment, a common approach of the Union as a whole does not exist. He also deals with potential future disputes between China and the EU and evaluates the changes of climate as the most important.

Centre for European Reform

The paper "[New Europe and the Economic Crisis](#)", written by Katinka Barysch, deals with the economic situation in new EU member countries. According to the author it is vital that these countries' governments do not procrastinate and that they face near-term problems such as ageing populations, global competition or tougher green targets and continue in their policy of liberalisation and integration.

European Union Institute for Security Studies

The aim of the publication "[European perspectives on the new American foreign policy agenda](#)" is to evaluate the impact of the election of President Barack Obama on American foreign policy. Emphasis is put on the analysis of EU-USA relations in the light of possible cooperation and common priorities.

Invitations

Panel Discussion: Europe without Barriers

When: 24th January 2009 from 9:30 am

Where: CERGE-EI Institute, Politických vězňů 7, Praha 1

Organiser: Association for International Affairs in cooperation with British Chamber of Commerce

Guests: Martin Tlapa – Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, Marek Mora - State Secretary, Monika Pajerová - Civic association ANO pro Evropu, Benjamin Kuras - writer, publicist

Registration: registrace@amo.cz

Conference: Lisbon Treaty Ratification – Current Issues

When: 26th February 2009, 3:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Where: Měšťanská beseda, Jungmannova 17, Praha 1

Organiser: CEVRO Institute, Office of the Government – European Affairs Information Department

Guests: Jan Kysela – Senate of the Czech Republic, Charles University Law Faculty; Miroslav Novák – CEVRO; Markéta Pitrová – Masaryk University

[More](#)

Lecture: Are EU Countries Able to Unite in their Fight against the Financial Crisis?

When: 26th February 2009 from 5 pm

Where: Eurocentrum Praha, Evropský dům, Jungmannova 24, Praha 1

Organiser: Eurocentrum Praha

Guests: Eva Klvačová – vice-principal for science and research at NEWTON College, a.s.

Registration

Lecture: First Two Months of the Czech Presidency – a View from Brussels

When: 2nd March 2009 from 4 pm

Where: Institute of International Relations, Nerudova 3, Praha 1

Organiser: EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy and Institute of International Relations

Guest: Piotr Kaczyński - The Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels (CEPS)

More

Expected Events

Václav Klaus' Speech in the European Parliament

On Thursday 19 February President Václav Klaus is to appear at the ceremonious plenary session of the EU in Brussels. Even though the President stated that he is not planning a dramatic speech, it is likely that by expressing his views of European politics he will trigger critical reactions of some politicians. Let's hope that a diplomatic rift like the one which occurred after the audience of an EP delegation at the Prague Castle in December 2008 will not be repeated.

Discussions about the "Post-Hague" Programme

From February 26 to 27 a meeting of EU countries' justice and interior ministers will take place in Brussels. A successor of the Hague Programme, which outlined the priorities of EU's internal security for the period from 2005 to 2009, will be among the topics discussed. The new document should reflect the development in the fields of justice and internal affairs as well as the situation in the EU following its enlargement to 27 member countries. The document shall be named the Stockholm Programme and like its predecessor it will be mainly concerned with mobility, safety and EU's law.

EP to Vote on Sanctions on Employers of Illegal Immigrants

On February 19, the European Parliament will vote on a directive which introduces sanctions on employers of illegal immigrants and secures legal pay conditions for illegal immigrants. The directive enjoys support among MEPs and also fulfills the interests of the Czech presidency in the sense of fight against illegal migration. More

Strengthening EU's Competitiveness – Potential of Migrants on the Job Market

From February 26 to 27 a conference on the topic of "Strengthening EU's Competitiveness – Potential of Migrants on the Job Market" will take place in Prague. In accordance with the key topics of the presidency it is plausible to expect discussions about workforce mobility, job markets' openness and their functioning during the crisis. More

European election 2009

ODS has Introduced its Candidates

Vít Dostál, Michal Vít

On February 10, PM Mirek Topolánek, chairman of the strongest party in the Parliament (ODS) presented his party's the first ten candidates for the European Parliament elections. A day before the executive council of ODS decided to point out to the mistakes of its biggest rival, ČSSD during the campaign. Jan Zahradil, the leader of the slate commented on this decision by saying that ODS does not want to repeat its mistakes from the autumn elections when it ignored the negative campaign which was led by ČSSD against ODS.

In the first ten we can find several current MEPs who have decided to defend their mandates. Number one is Jan Zahradil, who has previously expressed his interest in leading ODS' slate. Second position is reserved for a fresh face of Czech European politics – Evžen Tošenovský, former hetman of Moravia-Silesia region. MEP Ivo Strejček is third. New faces are: Eduard Eduard Kožušník (manager of eStat.cz project) and Andrea Češková, a representative from Prague 5. Petr Duchoň and Nina Škottová will not defend their mandates in the June elections.

ODS has unveiled its aggressive campaign on Friday February 13. The website cssdprotivam.cz which offers comments on social-democrats steps, is the main communication channel. For the time being Jan Zahradil is the leader of the campaign. On the freshly launched website he commented on Jiří Havel, leader of ČSSD's slate. He was later joined by PM Mirek Topolánek who denounced ČSSD's slate as weak. Social democrates commented on the campaign with certain irony, because reportedly it draws attention to them. Representatives of ODS add that they want to win the election to the EP, which means a gain of 7 mandates.

ČSSD has previously declared (see NL 3/09), that it wants to focus its campaign on the government's alleged inability to tackle the economic crisis. With the launch of the above mentioned website the pre-election campaign has begun and we can expect that ODS and ČSSD will dominantly set its tone, which will probably put small subjects concerned with European topics, in a disadvantage.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association for International Affairs.

Project Coordinator: Karel Ulík Project Assistant: Lenka Ryjáčková Mini-analyses: Ivan Kováč, Katarína Lokšová, Karel Ulík, Michal Vít Comments on Recent Events: Sylvie Milerová Interviews: Ivana Jemelková Interesting Publications: Sylvie Milerová Invitations: Lenka Ryjáčková Expected Events: Jan Potucký, Lenka Ryjáčková European Election 2009: Vít Dostál, Michal Vít Corrections: Lenka Ryjáčková (Coordinator), Jan Potucký Translations: Sylvie Milerová (Coordinator) Professional Editing: Ivana Jemelková, Karel Ulík Graphic Layout: Side2 Composition: Josef Vomáčka Office Contact: newsletter.ep@amo.cz

Association for International Affairs (AMO) Žitná 27, 110 00 Praha 1 Tel./Fax: +420 224 813 460 E-mail: info@amo.cz / www.amo.cz

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