



Asociace  
pro mezinárodní  
otázky  
Association  
for International  
Affairs

# Newsletter

## European program

### 1/2009

15 December 2008 - 4 January 2009

A Bi-monthly Review of European Affairs from the Czech Perspective

#### A Special Issue: Czech Presidency Begins

Dear readers

We have the pleasure to welcome you in the new year with a special issue of our newsletter which focuses on the start of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU 2009. The series of articles was prepared in the framework of the [PREDESDNICTVI.CZ](http://PREDESDNICTVI.CZ) web portal which is the key project of the Association for International Affairs (AMO) covering the topic.

We believe that the following texts will help you complete the overview of current issues and the [PREDESDNICTVI.CZ](http://PREDESDNICTVI.CZ) website will be your regular guide in the first half of 2009. Regular summaries of the content in English will be included in our bi-monthly newsletter.

With best regards on behalf of the European Program of the AMO Research Centre,  
Ivana Jemelková

#### In this Issue

**Priorities of the Czech Presidency: Three 'Es' and Other Challenges**  
**Can the Czech Presidency Be a Success?**  
**Reflection of the Czech Presidency in Media**  
**Slovenian Cooperation Agreement: A Model for the Czech Presidency?**  
**Supplement "European Election 2009"**

#### Mini-analyses

##### **Priorities of the Czech Presidency: Three 'Es' and Other Challenges**

Vít Dostál

The main priorities of the Czech Presidency in the Council of the EU will be economy, energy and a broader topic titled as Europe and the world. Regarding the economy, the Czech Republic will have to lead the debate on the financial and economic crisis in the EU. Moreover, the Czech Republic will represent, together with the European Commission, the EU at the international meetings focused on these problems. The aim of the Czech Republic will be to keep the Stability and Growth Pact effective and to prevent introduction of long term protectionist measures which would harm the single market principles.

In regard of the energy, the presidency is expected to try to re-open the debate on the diversification of supply roads and suppliers, and to propose better interconnection of EU transit networks. This issue is closely interconnected with the formulation of Eastern Partnership, which will be introduced at the spring European Council meeting. It should include detailed plans for cooperation with countries as Ukraine, Belarus or Moldova.

The priority in the EU external policy will be, last but not least, continuation of the accession talks with Croatia, the precondition of which is the settlement of territorial disputes between Zagreb and Ljubljana. Furthermore, EU should give a clear message of the possible EU membership to Serbia. The current situation in the Middle East will be a great challenge for the Czech Presidency, since it will be hard to find a strong common position among the member states. The first EU-Israel summit seems to be a great instrument for precisising mutual relations. A new trans-Atlantic dialogue with the Obama administration will be commenced during the Czech Presidency. On the agenda will be, apart from economic recession, also the search for a joint position for the December Copenhagen climate conference.

To sum the Czech priorities up, it is worth to say that not much has remained of the original plan which was supposed to focus mainly on the 'non-barrierness' of the Union. The announced priorities are definitely reasonable and reflect the current situation. Economic crisis is a defensive topic and the Czech Republic will probably try to obstruct imposition of protectionist measures. Many various and difficult tasks might be expected in the external relations area. The topic of energy, precisely the security of energy supplies, offers some space for the Czech Republic to propose its own motions, since this area was in the preceding Presidencies rather neglected. Before the European Parliament elections and mainly after them, debate about the designation of key EU positions (President of the Commission, High Representative for the CFSP and President of the European Parliament) will be started. The Czech Republic should moderate this discussion in such a way that the new member states are not omitted.

### **Can the Czech Presidency Be a Success?**

(A summary of the article published on [Respekt.cz](http://Respekt.cz))

Ivana Jemelková

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 the Czech Republic has assumed the presidency of the EU Council. Are we able to secure a reliable leadership for Europe during this time of uncertainty? Can our presidency be successful? It surely can, given that we fulfil some of the basic expectations.

First of all, secure peace for work itself. The last few months have unveiled the gloomy reality of the domestic political scene. Unrest in his own party as well as the instability of the government and persistent fights with the opposition have certainly affected the ability of PM Topolánek to be a true leader, which in turn led to the growing scepticism of foreign partners and the media. Secondly, the Czech presidency should not be tempted by comparison with the precedent grandeur of Mr. Sarkozy. On the contrary: it is vital to be realistic and rational in our job and concentrate on everyday work instead of the veneer of media gestures. Karel Schwarzenberg expressed similar opinion in his interview for the Financial Times when he said that it is important to be a "pragmatic, sober and therefore effective" leadership of the Union.

Thirdly, we need to admit to ourselves that our experience does not match that of "older" member countries, capacities are limited and our position on the international scene is incomparable with that of e.g. France or Germany. We have to be aware of the limits of what is possible and try to make the limits an effective work method as well as be ready to ask those who are more experienced for help. Fourthly, it is necessary to think in a horizon longer than six months because our membership in the European club does not end in June 2009. The picture other EU member countries have of us will be greatly affected for the next couple of years by the way we act in our presidency role.

And finally it is essential that the presidency turn inside of its own country and become a public event number one on the domestic scene. In May, 5 years will have passed from our EU entry. It is time to look back. [Full article](#)

## Reflection of the Czech Presidency in Media

Václav Bacovský

Let's be open about it from the very beginning: It is of little avail to overestimate our own media image. It is all the more important to emphasize this, since small countries like the Czech Republic tend to listen very carefully to how they are talked about outside the country's backyard. Obviously, we prefer to read those articles that pat us on the back. However there are not many articles of this kind (suppose sport successes are not taken into account), and thus we also take delight in the opposite extreme in a sadomasochistic way – we like to emphasize with a sense of forsaken exceptionality that such a basket case cannot exist anywhere else in the world. This moving between extremes has a reason. A harsh criticism is always better than total disregard. At the same time, the word indifference gives the truest picture of the interest of foreign media in the Czech Republic. Thanks to the presidency, the Czech Republic is having a ball with its five minutes in the spotlight, and we are excited that someone somewhere writes about us.

The logic of their functioning means that the media tend to present complex and abstract things (such as the European Union's modus operandi) in the form of snapshots, which they like to personify, or even worse, try to present everything in a negative light. No wonder then that the Czech presidency - seemingly illogically – is projected into the personality of Vaclav Klaus. It were the Austrian dailies that flaunted nothing short of an orgy of articles about Vaclav Klaus as a symbol of the upcoming (and beforehand botched up) presidency. Only French periodicals may have perhaps paid more attention to him.

No sophisticated content analysis is necessary to sense that the expectations as regards the Czech presidency are very low. Good for us! We will surely manage the presidency in what concerns logistics and organization. Regarding the content, it most likely will not be an impressive twister. A pragmatic and sober accomplishing of the EU agenda may not be so attractive for the media; however, it is much more relevant for the citizens. Rather than for their unexpected interest in the Czech Republic and Vaclav Klaus, we can thank foreign media for the fact that due to the generally low expectations, our presidency will most likely become a success.

## Slovenian Cooperation Agreement: A Model for the Czech Presidency?

(A sample of the article published on [PRESEDNICTVI.CZ](http://PRESEDNICTVI.CZ))

Michal Kubina

The Slovenian Presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2008 was characterized by several aspects for which it is compared to the Czech Presidency. One of them is the cooperation agreement, which was concluded between the government and opposition parties for the presidency period. But to consider the Slovenian agreement a model for the Czech Republic is problematic because of several reasons.

The main of them is a high degree of confrontation in the notably polarized Czech party system. Although the Czech political scene has already experienced an opposition agreement, the current leaders of both Civic and Social Democrats are reluctant to a similar arrangement. The main manifestation of the atmosphere of unwillingness, confrontation and mistrust is the “zero tolerance” policy and unrealistically inflated requirements of the opposition in a form of “trade-off” offers to the government. The opposition does not even rhetorically identify itself with the presidency and does not feel responsible for its course. In terms of political strategy it is thus increasing its critical potential but on the other hand, discards the possibility to benefit from any potential success of Czech politics. Confrontational atmosphere has also been reinforced by the government's fragile majority and a series of elections of 2008 and 2009.

Discussion on the Slovenian agreement began almost a year before the Slovenian presidency itself, in a relatively quiet “non-election” period and therefore was able to include the preparation phase of the presidency as well. As for the timing, the Czech situation was less lucky. Serious talks between the government and the opposition started only a few weeks before the presidency. It is also significant that in the Czech Republic, European issues are much more “domestic” issues and create one of the essential confrontation lines between the parties. Another specific of the potential Czech agreement is that it would be probably an agreement of only two bodies. This can be seen as risky from the point of view of the smaller coalition partners as well as voters.

However, some form of agreement is theoretically still possible, although probably only a minimalist version (the principle of pairing of Ministers, etc.). Slovenian experience shows that successful participation in the project or balancing between support and criticism of the government can be advantageous for the parties, no matter to which extent it is only formal and the fulfillment is debatable. [Full article](#)

## Comments on Recent News

### President Klaus' New Year's Address

A substantial part of the Czech president's [New Year's address](#) was devoted to the European Union. V. Klaus expressed his hopes that the Czech presidency will not be successful only in what concerns administrative and organisation. He has not forgotten to mention the Lisbon Treaty – in current hassle he strives for keeping Europe democratic as he has also stated in his recent [interview](#) for *Hospodářské noviny*. He has also called upon the Czechs to participate in the European Parliament elections. Despite a recent feud with the President, Prime Minister Topolánek [appreciated](#) the address and described it as “statesman-like and with a clear value message” and praised the call for fundamental economic reforms. The address was also monitored by the foreign media - server [Eubusiness](#) as well as French weekly [L'Express](#) notice that during the delivery of the address, only Czech flag was flown and therefore the President fulfilled his earlier promise not to fly the EU one.

### Ukraine-Russian Gas Dispute Arrives in Prague

On New Year's Day at 8.00 CET Russia ceased to supply Ukraine with gas. The reason of the dispute is Ukraine's debt. According to Russian giant Gazprom, the debt including penalty amounts to 2,1 billion \$. Before the end of 2008, Ukraine stated that it had already repaid the amount due. However Russia denied this information. Ukraine, which finds itself in the middle of the economic crisis, refuses Gazprom's attempt to raise the price from last year's 179,5 € / 1000 cubic meter. Transit fees for transport through Ukraine to are also in question. So far, a compromise has not been reached. Hitherto Ukraine has been consuming Russian gas for prices well under the market ones. The Ukrainian delegation is now trying to get support in other European countries and they have chosen Prague, the new seat of the EU Presidency, as their first stop. [More](#)

### The “Time machine” at Letná in Prague - Symbol of the Czech EU Presidency

Alexander Vondra, deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, [launched the Czech EU Presidency](#) symbolically with swinging and lightening up the Pendulum at Letná. Since 1 May 1955 this place was decorated with the monumental statue of J. V. Stalin designed by Otakar Švec, who had meant the design as a joke and later committed suicide before the unveiling. The monument known later as the “queue for meat” (a popular nickname referring to the reality of shops during communism) was destroyed in 1962 and in 1991 the temporary pendulum called “time machine” was built on the pedestal. This should be Prague's symbol of Presidency just like the French had the Eiffel Tower lighted in blue with European stars. Already on New Year's Day [somebody](#) damaged a piece of the lightened European flag under the pendulum by cutting it off.

## Interviews

“It is clear that it is much easier for someone like president Sarkozy to tackle the crisis in Georgia as well as the economic crisis. The French president can count on the support of a vast governmental administrative. However if it were in the same situation, the Czech Republic would enjoy the great support of European institutions. The key thing is to show the same energy and the same willingness to take risks – for example by going to the world and making it publicly and clearly known that Europe wants to solve a problem, wants discussion and wants an economic solution. The fact that you are a small country is no excuse and does not mean that you should not strive for great things.”

**John Palmer, founder of the European Policy Centre (EPC) in Brussels in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2008. [Complete interview](#)**

“Europe, respectively its establishment, is under great stress and when under stress people tend to say ugly stuff. Politics is a mere mirror but it works the same way. If Ireland and the Czech Republic do not ratify the Lisbon Treaty, then EU has a problem. It is almost impossible to solve it legally. Nervousness is on the rise – a lot of money and energy is vested into the revisionary treaties. So I perceive it as just another dimension of pressure, sort of a signature speculation. Our presidency will be as strong as strong will our PM be and as good as well everything will be prepared.”

**Markéta Pitrová of the Department of International Relations and European Studies of the Masaryk University in Brno in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2008. [Complete interview](#)**

“Of course that it is a democratic process. At the moment 23 countries have ratified the treaty and I think that this is an interesting situation – a big majority of the countries have adopted it according to their own rules which we respect and think that the rules should be changed. And then there are other countries which are still discussing the ratification and one country that has refused the treaty. I think that not only the Irish but also other states should be respected. And so, who is the one that should step back?”

**Claus Haugaard Sørensen, Director General of the DG Communication of the European Commission on the continuing ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2008. [Complete interview](#)**

## It Was Said In the European Union

**President Václav Klaus in his New Year's Day speech:** “There is no alternative to EU membership. It is unfair if someone tries to pretend that we claim otherwise.”

**French President Nicolas Sarkozy in the European Parliament:** “It was a wound to see that European flags were not on all public buildings in the Czech Republic. “

**Václav Bartuška, the Czech Ambassador-at-Large for Energy Security, about the Nabucco pipeline:** “It is a European fantasy which is not actual nowadays.”

## Interesting Publications

### Centre for European Reform

In his essay “[Why is Britain Eurosceptic?](#)” Charles Grant asks why the British are more hostile to the EU than any other European nation. The reason is often attributed to the role of different geography, history and economic situation; impact of the press and politicians' position. In this

context the fact that Brown's government is less enthusiastic about the EU than that of his predecessor, Tony Blair, does not mean much change. The author points out to practical issues and both positive and constructive British attitude to the EU. He concludes by predicting that the people will become more sympathetic when they feel the real benefits of the membership.

### **Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale**

In his paper "The EU-China Relations: Rhetoric versus Reality" Axel Berkofsky is deals with the EU-China relations and makes a good overlook of varieties of political dialogue and gestures mostly made by the EU. All these facts are put in direct opposition to the reality of mutual relations – the strive for common approach to crises' solutions and security problems faces the differing goals of both parties. According to the author, the key problem of EU-China relations is disunity and a large number of interests and stances notably between the Commission and EU Council.

### **Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exteriér**

In their broad paper "Is the European Union supporting democracy in its neighbourhood?" the team of authors is concerned with the following question - Is the EU successful in promoting democratic principles in the framework of the European neighbour policy? The authors use particular countries (including Morocco, Ukraine and Azerbaijan) as examples showing that the EU has failed in providing sufficient support to democratic changes in countries in EU's neighbourhood. They also deal with conclusions of programmes executed in particular countries. In the conclusion of the analysis we can find recommendations for each state. For example in case of Ukraine the EU should introduce a non visa regime and be more helpful with the problems of domestic institutions.

## **European election 2009**

### **European Parliament Elections: ČSSD, ODS and New Political Subjects**

Vít Dostál, Michal Vít

Social democrats (ČSSD) introduced their slate for the EP elections. Jiří Havel, former deputy prime minister in the Jiří Paroubek government and minister of education in the ČSSD shadow government, was chosen as the leader. The second and third position is occupied by current members of the EP Libor Rouček and Richard Falbr. On relatively good positions (5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>) are present members of the Czech parliament Zuzana Brzobohatá, Robert Dušek and Anna Čurdová, who specializes in the topic of gender equality and who is also the head of the Czech delegation to the Parliamentarian Assembly of the Council of Europe. After the regional and senate elections social democrats are very self-confident and want to gain 35 to 40 % of votes. Since the EP elections will probably follow the suit of the typical second-order elections, a remarkable strengthening of the main opposition party might be expected.

Neither has the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) announced the candidate list, nor have the ODS current members of the EP declared their will to put in for the seat. The only exception is Jan Zahradil. At the ODS congress it was settled that the party will try to found a new political group in the EP. The group will be rightist and should be based on non-federalist views. Among other political parties active in this cluster should be the British Conservative Party and also other parties from central and eastern European countries.

After the ODS congress a debate on forming a new rightist eurosceptic/eurorealist party or even parties was opened. New political party is being prepared by Petr Mach, executive director of the neoliberal think-tank Centre for Economy and Politics (CEP) and President Klaus' adviser. He would like to enter the election struggle as a part of Declan Ganley's movement. However, he does not want to limit the party's activities to the EP elections, his goal is to form a political subject which will participate in all elections. Mach is going to introduce detailed information on 12<sup>th</sup> January.

The following slate is supposed to come up from the background of the political movement 'Greens' – which broke away from the Green Party in 2005 – the opponents of the U.S. radar base and relatively radical ecological movements. Regarding the character of the forming subjects' background, this cluster's programme should be close to the Nordic environmental-left parties.

---

**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: Ivana Jemelková Project Assistant: Lenka Ryjáčková Mini-analyses: Václav Bacovský, Vít Dostál, Ivana Jemelková, Michal Kubina Comments on Recent Events: Jan Husák, Sylvie Milerová Interviews: Ivana Jemelková It was said in the EU: Karel Ulík Interesting Publications: Michal Vít, Lenka Ryjáčková European Election 2009: Vít Dostál, Michal Vít Corrections: Lenka Ryjáčková Translations: Sylvie Milerová (Coordinator) Professional Editing: Ivana Jemelková, Karel Ulík Graphic Layout: Side2 Composition: Josef Vomáčka Office Contact: [newsletter.ep@amo.cz](mailto: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](mailto:info@amo.cz) / [www.amo.cz](http://www.amo.cz)

---

© Association for International Affairs 2008

---