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Comment: The First Month at the Head of Europe

(A sample of article published on Respekt.cz)

Ivana Jemelková

The Czech Presidency has completed its first month. It is said, that rotation at the head of the EU helps new EU member states to explore what Europe really is about. The Czech Republic has found out more than enough in the last 31 days. The turbulent start of the Czech mandate was shaped by two major crises, it was also necessary to deal with EU's chronic problems and react flexibly to the new momentum in relations with the USA, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Zimbabwe and other players. Europe with all its pros and cons, live. And the Czech Republic should be the director of the show. How are we coping with the Presidency tasks?

The most commented events of the Presidency can be summarized by the following three words: Gaza, gas, Entropa. Three men of the Presidency took over the issues. Minister Schwarzenberg left for the Middle East accompanied by European diplomats. At the same time, the region was visited by President Sarkozy. Competing or complementary actions? France's responsibility stemming from its role of President of the UN Security Council, or a personal ambition of becoming a peacemaker? Facing a humanitarian disaster, a cease-fire has been eventually arranged. Who deserves the credit? And is this a step towards a more complex solution? Similarly, we can ask about the gas crisis. Here Prime Minister Topolánek was involved - travelling tirelessly and pulling the strings both at home and worldwide. Agreement between Russia and Ukraine was finally signed. A result of political or economic motives, or a compromise mediated by the Czech Presidency? And will the agreement survive the next freezing winter? Finally, Entropa was a task for minister Vondra. Although the content of the installation is extremely interesting and inspires and provokes a broad public reaction, the organizational and communication aspects of the project were poorly managed. Vondra then had to apologize almost everywhere. [Full article](#) (in Czech)

What Does the Putin - Tymoshenko Agreement Bring?

(A sample of article published on Respekt.cz)

Martin Laryš

On Monday 19th January 2009, Russia and Ukraine signed a ten-year contract on gas supplies and transit through the Ukrainian territory. This enabled the resumption of supply of this material to all the affected European countries. However, is this a final settlement? Isn't the joy over the end of the gas conflict a bit premature?

In accordance with the new agreement, Ukraine will pay market prices with an initial 20% discount. In 2010, it will move over to full European market prices. The price will be variable and will depend on the prices of petroleum products. Due to falling prices caused by the global financial crisis, however, it can be expected that Ukraine will not pay much more than they do now. At first glance it is a proof of constantly repeated Russian efforts to establish market relations with neighboring states. The desired market aspects, however fail in the case of transit fees, which remain the same - several times lower than in European countries. Ukraine thus loses millions of dollars.

At the Ukrainian domestic political scene, the contract is perceived as a success of Yuliya Tymoshenko, who at least formally managed to remove the corrupt company RosUkrEnergo (RUE). She is free to use the agreement in the up-coming fight for the presidential seat, where she may be presented as the only person who knows how to negotiate successfully and firmly with Russia. Tymoshenko presents the contract as a compromise agreement, when she "took everything possible" and Putin "protected everything necessary". [Full article](#) (in Czech)

EU Heading to a More Significant Role in Afghanistan?

Katarína Lokšová, Michal Vít

With Barack Obama in the presidential office, both the United States and the EU begin to discuss the security situation in Afghanistan in a more intensive way. The centre of mutual dialogue is especially a more extensive participation of European countries in terms of the missions ISAF and Enduring Freedom. Barack Obama has already clearly declared that Afghanistan is one of the pivotal US foreign policy priorities and also that he counts upon a bigger involvement of the EU countries. Obama is planning to increase the number of American soldiers from today's 36,000 to more than 60,000. His initiative has been welcomed by the General Secretary of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "I welcome the intention of the United States to dispatch more soldiers. However, I cannot accede to the fact, that the US should do all the hard work. Europe must strengthen its military presence, as well."

Relations between the EU and Afghanistan are currently legally covered by the EU-Afghanistan Joint Declaration from 2005 which points to the obligation of the EU to provide Afghanistan with military and civil aid. Cooperation was further strengthened at the Conference in Paris in July last year, where the European Union obliged itself to support Afghanistan in its endeavour to achieve stability and safety. In terms of the Czech presidency, the EU Troika along with the Afghan Minister of Foreign Affairs Dadfar Spanta took place on January 28. The Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg, announced after the meeting that the EU would like to reinforce its mission of experts not only in Kabul, but also throughout the country. There is still a question remaining, whether the EU will send out its observers to watch the upcoming Afghan presidential elections that are said to take place in August this year.

The destiny of the Czech mission in Afghanistan was rather uncertain at the end of the last year, as the governmental proposal to increase the number of soldiers was not approved by the Parliament. The current suggestion has been already passed by the Senate and the Parliament is expected to do so as well. The proposal counts on the approximate preservation of the current state – maximally 480 soldiers in the ISAF mission and 100 in Enduring Freedom.

The Ministers for Development Discussed Gaza and the Financial Crisis

Karel Ulík

On 29th and 30th January an informal meeting of EU Ministers for Development Cooperation was held in Prague. In the light of current affairs the ministers could not be quiet to the global financial crisis and humanitarian situation in Gaza.

The Czech Presidency has succeeded in pushing two new initiatives on the agenda – access to local sustainable sources of energy and the Eastern dimension of the European development cooperation. The second is not so much welcomed by those member states traditionally connected with Africa and Latin America. Although the Commissioner responsible for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel says that “it is not so, that by giving to one we take from the other”, it is obvious that there are limited sources. The joint Czech-Swedish topic was “democratic governance support”, which is also very sensitive as it goes further in democracy and human rights support than “good governance”. In the context of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza the ministers have joined the previous GAERC conclusions and have appealed to Israel to open the crossing borders in the Strip. “Today only 100-120 lorries loaded with humanitarian aid enter Gaza a day, but there is need at least for 600 of them,” said Michel, who recently came back from Gaza. EU will provide about 60 million Euros for the reconstruction of the infrastructure, water cleaning and energy sector. The Czech foreign minister Schwarzenberg also initiated a donors’ conference which will be held in Egypt at the end of the month.

The goal of the negotiations was to clear the ground for the May GAERC that will lead to binding outputs in these questions. The advantage of the Prague session was the informality of the debate, so the Czechs could check the reactions to their presidency priorities. The meeting was moderated by the Deputy Minister of the Foreign Affairs Jan Kohout. For a detailed analysis of the impact of the financial crisis on development countries, please see www.predsednictvi.cz (in Czech).

Comments on Recent News

The Lisbon Battle Continues

On 11th and 12th of February, for the second time, the German Constitutional Court is going to deal with the objections over the Lisbon Treaty, which “is threatening liberties guaranteed by the German constitution” and the institutional separation of powers too. Similarly, the Treaty’s outlook is grim in the Czech Republic as the Presidency gives more priority to energy and economic issues. Delays continue also in Poland, where Lech Kaczynski repeatedly proclaimed that he will not sign the Lisbon Treaty, until the second Irish referendum takes place.

Solution of the Troublesome Directive on Working Time

The directive on working time setting the maximum of 48 working hours per week without currently applied exceptions (used by 15 out of 27 member states) has created two opposed groups. The first one consists of the European Parliament advocating the directive. The other one is composed of the Member States which see the exceptions as a means to improve labour market flexibility in the current crisis and also to solve the problems in some industries. The solution the Czech Presidency wishes to negotiate until the end of March seems to be in the retreat of both parties and in leaving partial exceptions in place with an employee’s agreement.

European Commission Introduces Proposals for Global Pact on Climate Change

On Wednesday, 28th January, the European Commission introduced proposals for the global pact on climate change. Brussels calls for measures to be taken against states that pollute the environment with greenhouse gases the most, which means the US, China and India. The Commission asserts that the global warming cost will increase in the next decades; annual expenses will rise by 175 billion Euros by the year 2020. More than half of that sum will go to the

developing countries that pollute the environment the most, China and India. European Union and other economical powers should finance the global warming fight, other states should co-finance according to their possibilities. Emission permits trade is seen by the EU as another possibility. Brussels also advised the developing countries to decrease the emission limits to 30% by 2020 (in comparison with 1990). The EU has already taken significant steps in the fight against global warming changes, and taken measures in order to decrease the greenhouse gases emissions. It wants to continue in these steps during the December UN conference in Copenhagen.

Nabucco – a Way to Decrease Dependency on Russia?

The gas crisis which has hit Europe at the beginning of the year has pointed to the still open question of dependency on Russia and the need to diversify sources in the field of energy resources, especially gas. This topic was chosen by the Czech presidency as one of its key priorities and therefore it promotes Nabucco as an alternative leading to its fulfilment because it would exclude Russia and Ukraine from the transport of the crude. However the project faces some problems, notably the instability of the region from which gas would be imported. To the top of it, some countries including Germany are not too enthusiastic about the Czech plan and push for the launch of the “north way” through Baltic Sea. On the other hand the project Nord Stream is criticised by Poland and the Baltic states.

What Will Be the European States Position to Accepting Prisoners from Guantánamo

Guantánamo has been the subject of long-standing disputes between the EU and the USA. The situation should be changed by the inauguration of the new American president Barack Obama. On 22nd January, he ordered all the processes to be stopped temporarily for 120 days. The controversial Cuban prison should be closed in one year. Unfortunately, the question what to do with the prisoners (approximately 250) is still open. According to the American administrative, prisoners who are kept there without any substantial evidence should be freed. The rest of the prisoners should be transported to third countries. Although the EU has appreciated the president's decision, member states cannot find compromise on the question of prisoners. Some of the member states offered some help to the US, e.g. Portugal. Portugal called for the other member states to help US with this issue. The Czech Republic's position is mostly negative. Karel Schwanzenberg said: “First, I would ask the US, how many they will keep. They have caught them; let them take care of them.”

Interviews

“Ukraine is a remarkably underestimated country: in terms of both geographic and population size, which corresponds to France, as well as economic potential. Ukraine used to be the storage of corn for Europe. It could regain this status. Ukraine is also crucial when it comes to the geographical position to Russia. In my view, the EU must promote Ukraine as much as possible. (...) The Eastern Partnership proposed by the Czech Presidency, is one of the possible tools. The advantage is that the partnership will be differentiated according to particular countries, so Ukraine will be able to get everything, what it will be ready for. Except of membership. The promise of membership is not included in the proposal, even if that is what Ukraine clearly wants. But the EU today is not in a position to promise membership. We can speculate what the situation will be in five, ten years. In the meantime, however, we need to support Ukraine's political independence and territorial integrity, if that should ever come to question.”

Karel Kovanda, Deputy Director General - DG External Relations of the Commission, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 28 January 2009. [Complete interview](#)

"It may seem that after the era of G.W. Bush, who advocated more U.S. national interests, comes a new wave of cooperation. It may be filled with hope, but we could soon witness that Barack Obama as all his predecessors will defend the interests of Americans, his voters, in the first place. After a year or two, the relationship may be at the same level as it was before Obama's arrival to

the White House. It is good to look into the past sometimes. You will find that popular President Clinton was known in Europe as a unilateralist."

Bretislav Dančák, Director of the International Institute of Political Studies, Masaryk University in Brno, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 29 January 2009. [Complete interview](#)

"When it comes to it, some European states which previously called for the closure of U.S. prisons put their hands off; although it is clear that European partners will be needed to resolve the legal tangle. Those prisoners will be released, but have nowhere to go as in the countries of their origin they are often threatened with torture or other persecution. Our challenge is to help Americans by providing international protection to released captives who can not return to their home countries. It is important to stress that we are talking about those who have not been accused of any crime, yet for several years held in Guantánamo."

Dáša van der Horst, Director of Amnesty International Czech Republic, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 30 January 2009. [Complete interview](#)

"I am not concerned about Sarkozy's trip, because it was always like this when it comes to the conflict in the Middle East. When I was Foreign Minister, in moments of increased tension it was the EU Presidency which represented, but there were still many other foreign ministers and prime ministers traveling to Jerusalem or Ramallah. This is one of the initiatives. What we want is a ceasefire. Everyone's hand can be helpful."

Cyril Svoboda, Minister of Local Development, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 22 January 2009. [Complete interview](#)

Interesting Publications

Centre for European Reform

The latest bulletin [February/March 2009, Issue 64](#) deals not only with the new American president and his disarmament effort, but also with the recent gas crisis and puts emphasis on Russia-Georgia and Russia-Ukraine relations and their consequences for the EU. An article dealing with of lately urgent question of energy market is also interesting.

Clingendael European Studies Programme

["Recuperating the European Union's Foreign Policy Machinery: Beyond Institutional Fixes"](#) is a publication paying attention to EU's foreign affairs. It points out that the inability of Member States to unite undermines the credibility of EU. At the same time it emphasizes that the so-far non-ratification of the Lisbon Treaty is no excuse, because it is no panacea.

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

The European Union makes an effort to act in the Balkans as a power able to resolve conflicts. In the coming future, two other Balkan states are to start their accession negotiations, in spite of Brussels' doubts whether Bosnia, Serbia or Albania have made adequate progress. The publication ["Beitrittsanträge zur Unzeit"](#) examines the possibilities of these states.

Invitations

Guest Lecture: European Union Enlargement and Western Balkans

When: 5th February 2009, 5:30 pm

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

Organiser: Association for International Affairs

Guest: J.E. Samuel Žbogár – Slovenian Minister of Foreign Affairs

[More](#)

Symposium: Czech Foreign policy a its development

When: 10th – 11th February 2009

Where: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zrcadloový sál, Loretánské Square 5, Prague 1

Organiser: Institute of International Relations

[More](#)

Panel Discussion: NATO at 60

When: 12th February 2009, 4:30 pm

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

Organiser: Association for International Affairs

Guests: Michael Howard – member of the House of Commons and founder of Atlantic Partnership, Great Britain; Karsten Voigt – German Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Julianne Smith – European Programme of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

[More](#)

Expected Events

Croatian Prime Minister Expected to Talk to Hans-Gert Poettering

On 3rd February, the Croatian Prime Minister Ivo Sanadar will meet the President of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The main topic of the day will be the planned accession of Croatia to the European Union in 2011. However, its struggle is complicated by the territory dispute with Slovenia. [More](#)

Strasbourg Speech of the President of Palestine

Mahmoud Abbas, the President of Palestine, is to give a speech on 4th February, in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. His address will be a part of the event commemorating life and work of the Palestine poet, Mahmoud Darwish. The President of the European Parliament and its members will host the event, too. [More](#)

ECOFIN Meeting

European ministers in charge of economic and financial matters are to discuss the progress of the contemporary financial crisis. Moreover, they will be dealing with the so called “stabilizing programmes” for particular countries of the eurozone. The meeting will be held in Brussels. [More](#)

The Forty-Fifth Meeting of the CDM

CDM, standing for The Clean Development Mechanism is an agreement enabling developed countries to invest in projects decreasing emissions in the countries of The Third World. The treaty functions under the Kyoto Protocol. The forty-fifth meeting will take place with the EU countries taking part, as well. [More](#)

European election 2009

European Election 2009 – unclear identity of ‘Libertas.cz’, senator Štětina is going to participate in the elections, more information on the slates of EDS, Green Party and ODS

Vít Dostál, Michal Vít

Vladimír Železný, MEP, declared on 20th of January his willingness to stand as a candidate for the European Parliament Election. However, he does not want to run for the party he has been member of (Nezávislí demokraté – Independent Democrats), but for Libertas.cz which he has founded recently. After a series of opacities it came to light that the party was founded without a blessing of Declan Ganley. The newly emerged political grouping takes Železný as a platform and he is open to cooperation with other parties which are against the Lisbon Treaty and further

uploading of member states' competences to Brussels. He is not against cooperation with the Party of Free Citizens (Strana Svobodných Občanů), which was founded by Petr Mach and which waits for official registration. He insists on the autonomy of Libertas.cz and does not share all Ganley's ideas and opinions (such as direct elections of the EU president or support of the Union as such). It remains a question if Petr Mach would be willing to join controversial Vladimír Žlezený, since he already declared that he wants to cooperate with Libertas.eu directly.

Another public figure which decided to run for a seat in the EP is the current senator for Green Party Jaromír Štětina, who is going to lead the slate of the movement Mayors and Independent (Starostové a nezávislí). 'Mayors' profile themselves as a pro-European and liberal movement supporting e. g. decentralization of power, reduction of bureaucracy or assertive stance towards Russia.

Within the Green Party continues the nomination process of the regional organizations. Meanwhile, the highest number of nominations was obtained by MP Kateřina Jacques and Michal Horáček, an emigrant with double citizenship who is now MEP for German Greens.

ODS and ČSSD started to uncover their strategy for the electoral contest. ODS is going to devote 40 millions CZK to the campaign and Jan Zahradil who is on top of the slate announced that his party is ready to oppose the ČSSD in a better way than how it did in the autumn elections. The goal of the ODS is a support of 30 %, what is also a minimal goal of ČSSD. The whole slate of the civic democrats will be opened to public on 9th February and according to Zahradil nine MEPs and two ex-governors Tošenovský and Zimmermann want to be on it.

The ODS will probably compete also with the European Democratic Party (Evropská demokratická strana) of Jana Hybášková MEP. EDS introduced the top of its slate which apart from Hybášková includes also the ex-chief of general staff Jiří Šedivý, ex-vice-minister for regional development falsely accused in the Budišov case Věra Jourová, or a deputy in the Prague local authority Jana Ryšlinková.

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

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