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Interdisciplinary Seminar and Workshop  
for Czech and German Young Professionals

June 5 – 8, 2014

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# Managing Diversity - Economic and Political Implications

*Final Program and reader of the Second Workshop of the  
Fifth Year of Czech-German Young Professionals Program*



## **ABOUT CGYPP**

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The Czech-German Young Professionals Program (CGYPP) is an international network for young professionals from Germany and the Czech Republic. The program links the fields of academia, business, media, public administration bodies and NGOs. Twelve young professionals from Germany and the Czech Republic are invited to participate in a series of workshops and to collaborate on relevant economic, political and social issues. Participants have a unique opportunity to enter into discussion with distinguished experts and to acquire practical advice, ideas and stimulus for their future professional careers. CGYPP brings together people with varying professional backgrounds. By exchanging and sharing experience and perspectives, participants will not only broaden their horizons but will also increase their social capital.

## PROGRAM

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### Thursday, June 5, 2014

- before 15:00      Arrival of all participants  
*Venue: Hotel Amaris, Štěpánská Praha 2*
- 16:00 – 18:00      Introduction:  
Václav Bacovský (AMO), Tomáš Jelínek (Czech-German Foundation for Future), Jindřich Mallota (Hanns Seidel Foundation, Prague)  
**Expert Debate: Dealing with Social Exclusion: Integration of Roma Minority in the Czech Republic**  
  
Drahomíra Miklošová, mayor of Obrnice;  
Ivan Gabal, Member of the Parliament (KDU-ČSL)  
*Venue: Parliament of the Czech Republic; Sněmovní 4 Prague*
- 19:00 – 21:00      KafKabaret – 90th anniversary of Franz Kafka death (Grotesque Play)  
*Venue: Franz Kafka Bookstore Široká 14, Prague*

### Friday, June 6, 2014

- 9:00 - 10:30      **Expert Debate: How to Cope with Populism in the Election Campaign**  
Jaroslav Poláček, head of Campaign department TOP 09  
*Venue: Michnův palác, Újezd 450/40, 118 00 Praha*
- 11:00 - 12:30      **Expert Debate: The Role of New Czech Economy in the Globalized World?**  
Petr Skondrojanis, headhunter  
*Venue: Impact Hub Praha; Drtinova 10, Prague*
- 13:00 - 14:30      **Working Lunch with Anna Dimitrova, CFO Vodafone CZ**  
*Café Colore, Palackého 740/1, 110 00 Praha*
- 15:00 - 16:00      **Discussion with Lenka Zlámalová (tbc): Diversity of Czech Media Market: Wish and Reality**  
*Café Louvre, Národní 22 Prague*
- 16:30 - 17:45      **Introduction of Pragulic project: Explore Prague with Different Eyes**  
*Venue: Národní 35 Prague*
- 18:15 - 20:00      **Internal Workshop & Diner**  
Moderated by Václav Bacovský & Weronika Priesmeyer-Tkocz & Michal Vít  
*AMO, Žitna 27, 110 00 Praha 1*

## PROGRAM

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### Saturday, June 7, 2014

- 10:00 - 11:00     **Discussion: Standing Out In a Homogenous Society**  
Tomáš Zmeškal: novelist  
*Venue: Hotel Amaris, Štěpánská Praha 2*
- 11:30 - 13:00     Lunch
- 14:00-15:00     **Invisible Exhibition**  
Moderated by exhibition staff  
*Venue: Karlovo náměstí 1/23 Praha*
- 15:15- 17:30     Teambuilding: Exploring Prague with Different Eyes
- 18:00 - 22:00     Teambuilding: Czechs and Germans Cooking Together  
*Venue: Ola Kala, Korunní 115, 130 00 Praha 3*

### Sunday, June 8, 2014

- 9:30 - 13:00     Informal discussion  
**Pragmatism versus Idealism in Foreign Policy**  
Michal Kaplan, Czech Development Agency
- followed by Pétanque competition  
*Venue: Žluté lázně, Podolské nábřeží 3/1184 Prague*
- after 13:00     Departure

## BIO - SPEAKERS

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### **Ivan Gabal**

In November 1989 he became a member of the Civic Forum (the democratic political movement). In 1990 he was the election campaign manager of the Civic Forum and also acted as consultant in the election campaign for the Public against Violence movement in Slovakia. In 1991 he was the Director of the Department of Political Analyses in the Office of the President of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic. In 1992 he was again the election campaign manager, this time for the Civic Movement. Since 1994 he has worked exclusively in Gabal, Analysis & Consulting and GAC respectively, which is specialising in sociological, communication and political analyses and development strategies. In the 2013 general election he was elected as a MP for KDU-ČSL

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### **Jaroslav Poláček**

Jaroslav Poláček was born in 1976. He works as a deputy secretary general and campaign manager of TOP 09. He studied at Faculty of Social Sciences Charles university in Prague. From 2001 he is a member of state campaign committees (Coalition, KDU-ČSL, TOP 09). He is co-writer of 2 books and some articles not only about politic marketing but about the information technologic too. He is married and he has 6 years old daughter.

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### **Anna Dimitrova, CFO**

Vodafone, Czech Republic

Born in Sofia, Bulgaria, since childhood lived in Austria. She graduated at Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. After he studies, she worked in finance sector. Before she started to work in the Vodafone CZ, she was responsible Enterprise Marketing as well as for tarif development within Vodafone Germany.

## BIO - SPEAKERS

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### **Petr Skondrojanis**

One of the leading head hunters in the Czech Republic; he focuses on positive perception of trade mark as well as working environment. He was one of co-founder of „HR“ Caffee ton inspire people responsible for team management.



### **Tomáš Zmeškal**

He studied at King's College in London and worked as translator and lecturer at Charles University in Prague. Tomáš Zmeškal, stunned the Czech literary world and reading public in 2011 with his debut novel, *Milostný Dopis Klínovým Písmem* or *Love Letter in Cunieform Script*. The book is an unusual kind of love story with a broad historical sweep, covering the post-war period to the 1990s, and has a very innovative stylistic



### **Michal Kaplan**

After having completed the Diplomatic Academy in 1999, he joined the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he has focused mainly on development and international economic relations. He participated in various international conferences, including the Financing for Development event in Monterrey, Mexico, and the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana. Between 2002 and 2006, Mr. Kaplan represented the Czech Republic at the OECD Development Assistance

Committee in Paris. Between 2009 and 2013, Mr. Kaplan was posted to Brussels as Head of the External Relations Unit at the Czech Permanent Representation to the EU. In August 2013, the Minister of Foreign Affairs nominated Mr. Kaplan as Director of the Czech Development Agency which is the main implementation body for Czech development assistance.

## BIO - PARTICIPANTS

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**Jessica**  
GEDAMU

Serves as a project manager and consultant at EAF Berlin on a project supporting 100 companies across Germany in developing strategies and implementing measures with the goal to bring more women into senior management positions. After a Master's degree in International Business, Jessica pursued an interdisciplinary Master's Program in Gender and Diversity Competence at the Free University in Berlin. Further, I am an active member of the Business and Professional Women's network (BPW) and the International Society for Diversity Management (idm).

Jessica is convinced that being able to manage our society's diversity is key to social, political and economic stability and innovations across all sectors. Corporate as well as societal structures allow asymmetric levels of participation to various marginalized groups. Against this backdrop, Jessica contributes to building a society in which diverse perspectives can be voiced, are heard and acted upon.



**Malte**  
KOPPE

At the German-Polish Youth Office, Malte's mission is to assist young Germans and Poles and their educators to get to know each other on a more than just superficial level. Malte is interested in finding people from all around the world who believe what he believes. His search brought him so far to Berlin, Hamburg, Lublin (PL), Münster and, finally, Warsaw. He is really curious to compare the Czech Republic to his new home country of Poland. It is now almost ten years since he first visited Wrocław. Malte likes to think that Poland shaped him and taught him all he knows.

When it comes to the challenge and chance of diversity, he noticed a danger that elites in European societies perceive diversity rather as something positive, whereas the overall society does not fully share this perception. Plus, diversity is largely perceived as being limited to interculturality, which is, however, only part of the issue.



**Susen**  
SEIDEL

Susen works as research associate at the Institute for Research on Higher Education (HoF), Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg. After completing an M.A. in History and Slavic Language Studies, she worked as a lecturer at universities in the Czech Republic and in Russia. At HoF Susen assists in coordinating a cooperation project between various educational institutes in the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt, dealing with increasing heterogeneity in student populations. Besides this academic work, she serves as a volunteer in a programme supporting refugees in the city of Leipzig in dealing with public authorities and with health care.

Diversity is, in her perspective on higher education systems, is a major challenge, because students with a variety of starting conditions should also have access to suitable learning environments and be supported towards a successful degree.

## BIO - PARTICIPANTS

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**Ingrid**  
RÖDER

Ingrid, political scientist, desk officer at the German Federal Ministry of Finance in the Department for European Policy. Currently, her main areas of work are related to the European Central Bank, EU- enlargement issues as well as to the Western Balkan Investment Framework. Before moving to Berlin, Ingrid was a policy consultant in the Munich office for the first German governmental report on gender equality. After her Master in Gender and International Relations at the University of Bristol, Ingrid completed PhD-thesis on pre-accession assistance and gender equality during the EU enlargement of 2004, focussing on the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Afterwards she worked for two years as a research fellow within the European project QUING (based at the Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia).

The awareness of diversity and its impact on groups and work processes can be very important and enriching. For several years, Ingrid has been working in the field of European and gender issues and diversity, often in an international context. For her, diversity means to be aware of differences, to accept each individual for who they are, respecting and valuing their individual qualities and backgrounds.



**Carmen**  
ELLER

Carmen works as a journalist and author in Berlin with a special focus on cultural issues and literature from Eastern Europe, Russia and Israel. Diversity has been a central aspect in many of her articles. After her studies in Bamberg, Edinburgh and Madrid Carmen was a guest lecturer at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Romania where she taught language and journalism as a Fellow of the Robert Bosch Foundation. Afterwards she spent more than three years as an editor and reporter in Russia. She described this time in her book "Ein Jahr in Moskau" (Herder, 2010). Democracy needs diversity, she says. It is an enrichment and a challenge that we have to tackle together. Carmen is particularly interested in questions like: How does diversity change societies? How can we use its positive potential instead of seeing it as a source of conflict? And which role do journalists play in building a society that respects diversity?



**Zuzana**  
LÍZOVÁ

works as a journalist for the news website Česká pozeice [www.ceska-pozeice.cz](http://www.ceska-pozeice.cz) and contributes to the daily newspaper Lidové noviny. She gained her first professional experiences at the Czech News Agency (ČTK), the national public law news provider. She is specialized in German speaking countries. In her current position she writes mostly deeper analysis of the contemporary developments in German, Austrian and Swiss politics, culture and economy. She also occupies herself with Czech-German relationships. In 2011 she acquired a doctor degree in the field of International studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague. Her dissertation was focused on the role of culture and public diplomacy in foreign policy.

She joined the CGYPP to enrich her knowledge about Germany, to gain new contacts in her field of interest and to learn more about this year's topic Managing Diversity, which she sees as one of the biggest challenges of today's world.

## BIO - PARTICIPANTS

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**Pavlína**  
ŠOLCOVÁ

After having an internship at the Bank Austria (Product Management) within her doctorate studies she joined UniCredit SpA Permanent Establishment Vienna in December 2013. Pavlína is working as a consultant and her main activities are related to process management and projects of Chief Operations Management. Pavlína studied Economics and Management at the Mendel University in Brno with particular focus on EU market. She has been dealing with the issues of international relations, EU external policy and projects of development cooperation since January 2008 when she became a member of the Ministry of Finance team responsible for International Financial Institutions and later of the Czech Development Agency. Because of interconnected economy and common EU policy she believes that the way how to reach this goal is among others to be able to cooperate, agree proposals and deliver results together despite of diversities of our cultures; therefore she joined CGYPP.



**Filip**  
HORNER

Works for Vodafone Group Services in its mobile Commerce business unit as a Manager for Mobile Wallet. Filip looks after mobile payment business development with European banks and is responsible for new product features Vodafone will be rolling out in its European footprint. Inventing new technologies in an international role means interacting with many nationalities and people of various backgrounds on a day to day basis. Therefore the theme 'managing diversity' was a key driver to apply for CGYPP in 2014. Filip studied business administration and sports management in Bayreuth and Madrid and is looking forward to meet exciting Czechs and Germans who share his interest in the relation of both countries.



**Hana**  
KOŘÍNKOVÁ

Since 2013 Hana have been leading the team of Compliance and Risk Management in the company E.ON Czech Republic. Within this position it is her responsibility to implement Compliance Program and Risk Management System including risk monitoring and reporting for the whole E.ON Czech Group. In the 2009 Hana graduated from the University of Economics in Prague where she studied International Trade; she spent part of her studies at the Johannes Kepler University in Linz, Austria. Hana decided to join the CGYPP program in order not only to broaden her horizons regarding Czech-German relations, but as a hope to get new inspiration through experience sharing with other participants. During my studies at university I worked on a project with focus on the topic "Managing Diversity", nowadays Diversity still follows me in my business life also due to her position as a female manager.

## BIO - PARTICIPANTS

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**Jan**  
PERLA

Jenda is an Social Media Maniac. Jan works for companies and non-profit organizations as a free marketing consultant specialized in new media. In 2011 he graduated from Masaryk University in Brno with Bachelor degree from digital media and journalism together with European studies; he focused in thesis on Czech political parties on Facebook. Jenda is interested in politics for a long time; I also run the campaign for Green party in 2013.

Concerning of CGYPP Jan believes that we can manage and develop diversity in Europe only in close cooperation with others. Knowledge, understanding and cooperation are the keys. It's better to utilize diversity in Europe, than fight each other or trying to unify us all.

Little curiosity about him: he's also a floorball referee.



**Milan**  
PÁTEK

Works as Project Manager in European Project Center by the University of Sciences in Dresden, where he manages international European projects. Previously he worked for Development Bank of Saxony in Dresden; he was responsible for the Czech-Saxon and Polish-Saxon cross-border projects. Before that he worked for CzechInvest Agency firstly in AfterCare Department in headquarters in Prague and later on as Director of foreign office in Düsseldorf where he was responsible for Germany, Austria and Swiss operations. He worked also for Robert Bosch on different positions. He studied Business Administration at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem and now he is finishing his next Master Studies in Investment Promotion and Economic Development at Edinburgh Napier University. He applied to the CGYPP in order to get the opportunity to discuss current theme - Managing Diversity in view of his and other participants' experiences.



**Armin**  
PIÁLEK

Since May 2013 Armin has been the North America Representative of the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt. In this capacity, he coordinated the cooperation with the Taproot Foundation in New York and San Francisco; the aim is to bring professional Pro Bono Services to Germany and create a global Pro Bono network. Armin completed a Master's degree in Eastern European Studies with a focus on politics and economics at the Free University of Berlin. Starting as an intern in the Asian Relations Department of the BMW Foundation, he was a Fellow from 2010 until the beginning of 2012 and then a project manager in the social innovations department.

For Armin diversity has many dimensions like age, gender, culture and social background; he have found working in diverse teams extremely rewarding. Working in diverse environment requires important abilities like the listening, being patient and open to come to a solution anyways.

## VENUES and MAP

### PRAGULIC (PRAGULIC.CZ)

Pragulic is a social enterprise that challenge the stereotypes associated with homelessness by enabling people to experience the world from a homeless perspective.

### VENUES

#### Impact HUB Prague

The Prague Hub opened its doors in summer 2010 as the first herald from Central and Eastern Europe, and our space has been expanded twice since. Today, almost four hundred members take advantage of our co-working space and many more clients use our facilities for their conferences, workshops and various other functions.

#### CAFE LOUVRE

This Café, bearing the name of the world's famous gallery, has been standing here for over a century, since 1902. Among its guests were Karel Capek, Franz Kafka as well as Albert Einstein during his professorship in Prague. The Café's life was interrupted by force in 1948 by the communist coup when all café fixtures were thrown out of the windows into Narodni Avenue.

The cultural melting pot was revived in the place after 1992 when the devastated premises underwent a complete reconstruction.



## CONTACTS

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### ORGANIZERS:

**MICHAL VÍT**

**GSM:** +420 777 678 947

*micHAL.vit@amo.cz*

**VÁCLAV BACOVSKÝ**

**GSM:** +420 724 288 259

*vaclav.bacovsky@gmail.com*

### HOTEL:

**HOTEL AMARILIS**

**Štěpánská Praha 2**

**PHONE:** +420 222 748 111

### **Text for debate with Drahomíra Miklošová and Ivan Gabal: Dealing with Social Exclusion: Integration of Roma Minority**

*Czech mayor gets Council of Europe prize for assisting Romany integration*

Daniela Lazarová

The Czech Republic is often criticized for failing to address the problems of its Romany minority and give the Roma equal access to education, work and housing. While the authorities frequently point out that addressing these problems is a long an uphill task, the mayor of Obrnice, a small town in north Bohemia, has just proved that it can be done. She has been awarded the Council of Europe's DOSTA! prize for innovative work in combating anti-Romany sentiments and assisting Romany integration.

When Drahomíra Miklošová first moved to the town of Obrnice, cohabitation with the Roma community was so bad and relations in the town so tense she seriously considered settling elsewhere. In the end she not only stayed, but became active in local politics. Seven years ago she was elected to the town council and has devoted all her time and energy to making the town a better place for everyone – first and foremost the long-ostracized Roma community. On Wednesday she travelled to Strasbourg as the only Czech mayor to receive the Council of Europe's DOSTA! prize for assisting Romany integration. Ms. Miklošová says the way to achieve results is by working with whole families – and above all – by giving the Roma work.

“The Roma are given work opportunities in community service, they are active as street workers, as assistants to the local police force in helping to curb street crime. I feel it is important to give people responsibility for something. We also make a point of working with families, getting parents to send their children to school – and giving them access to extra-curricular activities, music, dance, painting classes. In the past two years this has brought results and I am proud of the fact that all the children who finish primary school in Obrnice now go on to study at higher-level schools.”

All this requires money and Drahomíra Miklošová says she cooperated closely with the government's agency for social inclusion and a number of NGOs in order to obtain finances and advice in implementing her plans. They were financed in part from EU funds and in part from state subsidies. One of the most important decisions was to secure council housing for Romany families, preventing real estate owners from sponging off the state by pocketing housing benefits. The mayor says that money alone would not have been enough had there not been enough will on the part of her co-workers and the town's inhabitants to bring about change.

“It is essential for the town council to really commit to addressing these problems. This cannot be taken for granted and where there is no real will it's just not going to happen. You have to work to build bridges and bring down existing barriers, to use every opportunity to present the Romany culture –on children's days, at senior citizen's events, on holidays – the more people know about the Romany culture the higher your chances of doing away with prejudice. Of course it doesn't always work –you get all kinds of people. But you need to keep at it –rise above the cultural differences and address any problems that arise.”

Drahomíra Miklošova says that while she is proud of how much the town has achieved in assisting Romany integration in the past decade, plenty still remains to be done. Nevertheless, at a time of high unemployment and growing racial tensions in the north and eastern parts of the country the town of Obrnice is being set as a bright example to others.

<http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/czech-mayor-gets-council-of-europe-prize-for-assisting-romany-integration>

### Text for debate with Jaroslav Poláček: How to Cope with Populism in the Election Campaign Populist parties set for 10 percent of Czech EU vote

*Kateřina Šafaříková*

**BRUSSELS** - Czech voters have only just voted in national elections so persuading them to go to the urns once more is seen as the biggest challenge ahead of the May EU vote.

Vačlav Klaus - will he or won't run to be an MEP? (Photo: European Parliament) Nevertheless unexpected candidates have already popped up to make it a lively campaign. The elections at the end of October last year brought victory to the social democrats, with 20.45 percent of the vote, and to a new protest movement known as ANO 2011 which got 18.65 percent. Together with the Christian Democrats (6.78 percent) they formed a coalition government. But the new executive only took office during the last week of January. It is precisely because of the unusually long post-election negotiations and the lengthy political crisis that resulted in last year's caretaker government that Czechs may feel fed up with politics and ignore the European vote, say social researchers. "The European elections usually fall in the second half of a government's mandate, turning it into a referendum on the current executive," says Daniel Kunstat, a sociologist at the Centre for Public Opinions Surveys (CVVM) in Prague. "But this will not be the case this year," he continues. "In May, it will be the new cabinet's fourth month of office. That's not enough time to generate strong feelings and therefore secure substantial participation." Only highly politically motivated people will show up at the ballots, according to Daniel Prokop, researcher with Median, a polling agency. "I would expect the turnout to be even lower than the 28 percent we saw in 2009," he says. So voting will either confirm the parties' status in the October elections – as suggested in a brand new survey by the CVVM – or a space will open up for an unusual campaign.

#### **The sociologist versus the lobbyist**

The social democrats have chosen well-known university professor Jan Keller to head their European election list. While Keller, a sociologist, appears an odd choice for an urban population with his almost neomarxist rhetoric and 1980s look, he is a savvy public speaker and knows how to appeal to the lower middle classes living outside the big towns.

"In this country an EU campaign never had a strong social theme with a European feel. This may change this year," says Prokop, pointing to the EU's high rate of unemployment. "Social inequality, the decline of the welfare state and the crisis of capitalism, these are Jan Keller's very topics. And he knows how to reach out to the audience. People only have to believe he can make a difference." The ANO movement has nominated Pavel Telicka, the Czech Republic's first EU Commissioner, to head its list. Telicka worked as a lobbyist in Brussels for several years after his term as commissioner ended. With his poker face and expensive watch, he embodies a business world that Jan Keller opposes.

The likelihood of these two dominating the campaign is high, particularly as there appears to be no one else to take the limelight. The centre-right ODS, for example, is in a shambles due to scandals and weak party leadership. Having for several years been one of the dominant parties in Czech politics it is now set to get just 5-7 percent of the vote.

#### **Anti-Roma sentiment**

But it may well be that Czech voters follow their western European neighbours and support anti-establishment or xenophobic parties. As a landlocked and extremely ethnically homogeneous state of 10 million people, the Czech Republic is not fertile soil for the classic anti-immigration agenda of the West. But there is antipathy in many quarters towards the 300,000-strong Roma minority.

This reached its peak last year when the white majority marched against Romas in regions with a substantial Romany presence. The marches were organised by extremist groups but locals took to

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the streets with them to shout “gypsy bastards” in front of Roma houses and to the faces of the riot police. Such anti-Roma sentiment provides a clue to the success of Usvit (or the Dawn), a new populist movement led by travel-agent-turned-politician Tomio Okamura. Usvit was only founded in spring of last year, but it managed to make it into parliament in the October elections, scooping 6.88 percent of the vote. It did particularly well in the areas where the anti-Roma marches were held. Okamura, who is half Czech and half Japanese-Korean, has suggested Roma people should be encouraged to “leave the Czech Republic to form their own state – for example in India, the place of their ancestors”. One public poll in January saw him named the country’s most trustworthy politician. “Okamura’s Usvit successfully steals the agenda from the extremists and thrives on the latent anti-gypsy sentiment of the Czech people,” says Petra Vejvodova, a Czech specialist on extremist politics. Usvit has chosen the controversial lawyer, Klara Samkova, to lead its European election campaign. In her first media pronouncement as head of the list for the EU election, she praised Europe for being a fortress when it comes to immigration. “We’re sorry, don’t get aboard your shanty boats. We will not receive you,” was her message from Prague to refugees on Italy’s Lampedusa island, the first European port of call for thousands of migrants from Africa. Pollsters say populist politics could get 10 percent of the votes in the EU elections, with Usvit scooping the lion’s share.

### **Will Vaclav Klaus run or not?**

Meanwhile, mystery surrounds the possible candidacy of former Czech president and famous EU critic, Vaclav Klaus. There was much speculation recently that he would end his career with a stint as an MEP. For now, however, his spokesman is refusing to answer any questions about his boss’s ambitions. This may be because Klaus’ resurrection has already failed once. During the recent national elections, he accepted to be the VIP supporter of an umbrella group of nationalists and hardcore eurosceptics. They scored just 0.42 percent of the vote. But according to pollsters, if he lines up with Okamura, Klaus’ euroscepticism might just tempt some more voters over to Usvit.

Czech voters will elect 21 MEPs to the 751-strong European Parliament on 23 and 24 May.

<http://euobserver.com/eu-elections/123074>

## **Text for discussion with Lenka Zlámalová on diversity of Czech media market**

### **Who Owns the Czech Media?**

*Jan Adamec*

In 2013, voters, politicians and businessmen dramatically redrew the Czech media map. How will these changes affect the quality of Czech democracy, of which a free, independent and responsible media are an integral part? Will the media irrevocably turn into trumpets of particular political and economic interests, carriers of advertising content and meatless infotainment? Or will they, despite these developments, retain a spirit of public service and determination to truthfully represent the world around us?

The transformation of Czech society that took place in the 1990s brought about dramatic changes in the world of media. At first, it seemed that the press would return to the obsolete, pre-1948 model of ownership-publishing relations. Each of the major political parties would own a periodical and use it to assert their political agenda. Plurality would then result from the competition of their ideas. Nevertheless, the efforts of the new or newly reestablished political parties to get the journals under their control did not have a long duration. ODS, the dominant right-wing party during the 90s, managed to

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set up and run the *Denní Telegraph* (The Daily Telegraph) newspaper between 1994 and 1997. However, the demise of the Klaus government and the related loss of necessary political-economic backing brought this ambitious experiment to an end. Communist *Haló noviny* (Hello News) is thus — ironically — the only periodical that has succeeded in retaining its strictly partisan nature.

Business was more powerful than politics. The periodicals were first privatized by journalists or newspaper managers, only to be later resold to foreign owners. The German media industry viewed the CEE region as an interesting investment opportunity. Thanks to the generally liberal attitude and the open economic policies of the Klaus era, Germans gradually gained in the Czech Republic one of their largest market shares in Central Europe. Yet, in parallel with the *laissez-faire* rhetoric, Czech citizens and politicians reflected positively on the 'family silver,' and belatedly they expressed anxiety about the large-scale sale of Czech companies — including publishing businesses — to foreigners. Additionally, the issue of foreign ownership had a specific national and historical dimension in the Czech context. Harsh debates on the post-WW2 Beneš Decrees, which authorized the expulsion of the so-called Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia, and on the relations with Germany in general, led to an obvious shortcut in the public discourse, supported by lesser or greater conspiracy theories. It was said that Germans had 'bought' the Czech press [1] in order to skew Czech public opinion to the benefit of the Sudeten Germans, with the aim to force the Czech government to agree to property restitution. Eventually though, the Sudeten problem became gradually depoliticized after the Czech-German Declaration was signed in 1997, and with that, the anti-German sting, with respect to the owners of *MF Dnes* or *Lidové noviny*, also subsided. On the contrary, some editors began to appreciate that they were not existentially dependent on party secretariats and that in case of a conflict, they could turn to an economically strong and independent entity. A new danger, however, started emerging from a different side. The basic paradigm of relations between media and their owners had changed since 1989, yet "the greater diversity and mass media independence from state authorities was, to a certain degree, 'traded' for increased media dependence on the economic system and its principles." Party secretariats and state censorship bodies were replaced by advertising departments. Thus, even foreign publishers could not remain immune to the pressure of important advertisers who did not like a specific article or commentary. Nevertheless, this was mostly about particular business interests, and not about a long-term political-economic agenda, which, in the new millennium, was pursued by the powerful oligarchs.

### Five families

More than a year ago, Eric Best, an American journalist living in the Czech Republic, came up with an interesting typology of 'families' controlling the country, referencing *The Godfather*, the famous Mafia novel by Mario Puzo. He counted five of them — Petr Kellner, the founder and majority shareholder of PPF Group, a private equity company; Marek Dospiva, one of Penta Investments' partners; Patrik Tkáč, the J&T investment group vice chairman of the board; Karel Komárek, the director of the investment company KKCG; and Zdeněk Bakala, the largest shareholder of the BXR Group private equity company. Best also identified two oligarchs who could match the above-mentioned in terms of their wealth and influence. These are Martin Roman, the former head of ČEZ, a major state-controlled utility company, and Andrej Babiš, the owner of the food processing and chemical industry conglomerate *Agrofert*, and leader of the political party ANO 2011 (and today the new Finance Minister).

Thanks to their broad range of entrepreneurial activity, stretching from financial services and telecommunications to energy and heavy industry, these families and individuals enjoy enormous economic, and thereby also political, power. The 'family' needs, among other things, include appropriate 'media backing,' that is, the ability to enforce its interests via media, or to use these to attack its adversaries. It can achieve this by hiring PR agencies or taking advantage of its advertising power, or by simply buying its own media outlet. The first one to do so was Zdeněk Bakala, who, in 2008, purchased the daily *Hospodářské noviny* (Economic News), and the weekly *Respekt* (Respect) from the German company *Handelsblatt*. It was no coincidence that at the same time, Bakala was underwriting

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the initial public offering of his mining company NWR. The prestigious daily could help protect his key business on the media front, especially when there was an emergency crisis communication, as was the case when the management of NWR announced its plans to close down a coal mine in northern Moravia. *Hospodářské noviny* was then more than eager to echo the official PR line of its owner that Bakala was not a majority owner of the mining company and as such was not obliged to deal with nor represent the issue in public.

### **Renationalization and concentration**

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, as a result of the global print media crisis and plummeting profits from advertising, long-term strategic investors began to pull out of the CEE region, turning their attention to the more promising markets of Africa and Asia. 2013 thus was the year of major shifts in the Czech media ownership structure. According to journalist and media manager Veselin Vačkov, it was only now that the interests of potential sellers and buyers had truly met. In June, the ambitious Babiš, whose party ANO 2011 had been by then fully engaged in a massive campaign for the upcoming parliamentary elections, acquired from Rheinische-Bergische Verlagsgesellschaft the dailies *MF Dnes*, *Lidové noviny* and the free daily *Metro*. Together, these account for 34% of the market share of newspaper readership. However, his acquisition objectives reached beyond the realm of press and the ultimate goal is to build a fully-fledged media house. After the most widely read serious daily and most listened to radio station *Rádio Impuls*, the next target is allegedly a TV channel with national coverage, most likely the most viewed commercial station *TV Nova*. In light of the success of Babiš's ANO in the elections that brought the party six ministerial posts – including the Ministry of Finance for Babiš himself – it is precisely this concentration of political and economic power, coupled with significant media impact, that raises major concerns.

But the renationalization of Czech press by local oligarchs does not stop there. Two other billionaires, Daniel Křetínský and Patrik Tkáč, bought in December from Ringier Axel Springer the tabloids *Blesk* (Flash), *Aha!* (Look!) and *Sport* (as well as the weekly *Reflex*) that jointly represent about 30% of the market. A strange common trait of these recent acquisitions is the fact that the oligarchs overpaid for the publications significantly, since, as ironically mentioned by Best, Tkáč and Křetínský paid for *Blesk* and the others almost as much as Jeff Bezos from Amazon paid for *The Washington Post*. As a result of these transactions, only two relevant competing media were left on the national market of dailies: *Deník* (The Daily), published by the last remaining foreign owner VLP, with an 18% market share that makes it the second most widely read serious newspaper after *MF Dnes*; and *Právo*, with a readership of 8%.

According to his critics, the shadow of Babiš is beginning to hover also above the public media, which the politicians have always understood to be their property. The role of the converter of political influence is played by the so-called media councils, the members of which have the power to suspend the director of public TV or radio. March 2014 will mark the end of the mandate for one-third of Czech TV council members, who are mostly affiliated with the now out-of-power ODS, so one can reasonably expect a personnel earthquake in which both the Social Democrats, as well as Babiš's ANO, will try gain control.

### **Media hunted by the ghost of self-censorship**

This oligarchic renationalization of the Czech press – and potentially other types of media – is likely to have an interesting impact on public and political life. How will the new owners influence the content of their periodicals? What will they tolerate? And to what extent will the editorial staffs accommodate their visions? Will the readers trust the journalists of *MF Dnes* when they write about a government in which Babiš is the Finance Minister, or their colleagues from *Reflex*, when they report on business activities of its owners? Consider the position taken by the weekly *Respekt*, formulated by its editor-in-chief Erik Tabery in a editorial from 21st September of the previous year. Tabery was asked how his weekly was going to cover the situation concerning the mining company OKD, that had just

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announced plans to close one of its major mines – Respekt’s owner, Bakala, is a major stockholder in the company. Tabery responded that Respekt would not cover the story. They would simply not deal with Bakala’s activities. This, of course, is the worst possible answer to the question of whether the new media ownership will destroy journalism.

A similar question mark may be hanging also over media owned by Andrej Babiš. He has been in the media business only for a short period of time, therefore, it is difficult to pass judgment. But some incidents so far can offer some clues. Only two days after his purchase of Lidové noviny had been announced, Babiš phoned one of its journalists and asked him angrily why a press conference of his ANO 2011 movement was not covered and who had made the decision. When this incident became public, Babiš backed down and promised to establish an ethical code within his media holdings to regulate the relationship between the owner and the editorial staff. More telling was the reaction of some renowned and experienced journalists at MFDnes and Lidové noviny, who resigned after the new owner was announced, including Editor-in-Chief Robert Čáslenský; Tomáš Němeček, who oversaw the paper’s legal coverage; chief commentators Daniel Kaiser, Lenka Zlámalová and Martin Weiss; and investigative journalist Jaroslav Kmenta, who said, leaving his job: “Real investigative journalism will not be possible under the new owner.” And only recently one external journalist working at MFDnes was not offered future long-term contract, allegedly because he criticized Babiš for choosing a representative of the chemical industry as Minister of Environment. He also claimed that one of the chemical factories from Babiš’s conglomerate is one of the biggest polluters in the region. In order to stave off mounting accusations of partisanship and self-censorship, Babiš employed as editor-in-chief for MFDnes another big name in the Czech journalism – Sabina Slonková. She did her best to disperse any doubts that MFDnes would lose its independence and asserted that journalists under her leadership would investigate Babiš’s political or economic activities as everyone else’s.

The key long-term issues of the Czech media may consequently be self-censorship, enfeebled credibility and the public’s suspicion that editorial staff favor their patrons. The journalists themselves will have to defend their professionalism, based on impartiality and independence, in order to retain and regain the trust of their readers. Free, independent and professional media are essential for public control of the political process, yet nowadays the Czech commercial and public service media seems to be under a double attack, led from one side by powerful business oligarchs and from the other side by eager-to-control politicians.

[1] The dominant corporations active on this market come, with the exception of Finnish Sanoma, from the Federal Republic of Germany – Passauer Neue Presse, Burda Verlag, Heinrich Bauer Verlag, Rheinisch-Bergische Verlagsgesellschaft, Axel-Springer Verlag or Verlagsgruppe Handelsblatt – or other German-speaking countries (Swiss Ringier).

<http://visegradrevue.eu/?p=2249>

## **Text for Discussion with Tomáš Zmeškal** **Tale of success for pupil of Chaucer**

Bernie Higgins

The guest on Czech Books this week, Tomáš Zmeškal, stunned the Czech literary world and reading public this autumn with his debut novel, *Milostný Dopis Klínovým Písmem* or *Love Letter in Cunieform Script*. The book is an unusual kind of love story with a broad historical sweep, covering the post-war period to the 1990s, and has a very innovative stylistic approach. After almost unbelievably positive reviews it sold out immediately and went into a second edition – the sort of “overnight success” and “literary sensation” most writers must dream about.

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**I must say that for an overnight success you had quite a long time to wait.**

"Yes, the book was first finished about four or five years ago and then I sent it to various Czech publishing houses which deal with contemporary Czech prose and there wasn't interest in the book at all. Then a friend of mine took it to Torst publishing house and they liked it and they decided to publish it almost immediately."

**And thanks mainly to a review by critic Jan Rejžek, who isn't at all known for his kind reviews. He gave you such an outstanding review, comparing you to great Czech writers such as Škvorecký and Hrabal and also to Salman Rushdie, and this was only part of great critical acclaim. How have you dealt with becoming something of a literary sensation?**

"Well I didn't have to deal with it much because I didn't know about it first of all because the friends I have seem to be very timid and careful people, very polite, and they didn't want to bother me with that review because they thought I knew about it, but I didn't. So I was quite surprised, and then of course Jan Rejžek's review brought a lot of attention from other reviewers and so so far I'm surprised because the reviews have been very good - to very very good."

**The English translation of the title is Love Letter in Cuneiform Script. Can you summarise the plot?**

"It's about a family; the main characters are Josef and Květa, his wife, who meet before the Second World War. During that time the Czech scholar Bedřich Hrozný deciphered the language of the Hittites, who used to write in cuneiform script, so there is a chapter which describes that, and this is where the title comes from."

**So the main couple meet at one of the pre-war public lectures Professor Hrozný gave. But then the book is something of a family saga almost going up to the present day.**

"The book covers a period from the end of the second world war to the 1990s and there is a kind of obvious love triangle, two men and one woman, then the couple get married and their friend, whose love wasn't appreciated, joins the communists later and uses his position in a way to break up the marriage of his former friends. Which doesn't succeed completely but it succeeds to a certain extent to embitter their relationship."

**And it's written in a very interesting, unusual style or styles. Each chapter has a different tone, different perspective, and you also include visionary chapters too. Could you say a little about this stylistic variety?**

"Yes, I wasn't interested in writing a novel in this great 18th or 19th century tradition where everything has its proper place and when you can predict what happens in the future so I changed the styles according to through whose eyes the tale is narrated."

**One of the many perspectives or viewpoints in the book is actually an Englishman's, or at least an Englishman of Czech origin.**

"Yes, it is, it's George, or Jiří in Czech, who's a nephew of someone within the family. And he has Czech parents but is born and brought up in London and he arrives in Prague and gets involved in this family story. He sends letters back home to his sister about the Czechs and he observes the Czech traditions - some of them seem very funny to him and some of them very absurd. For example, he sends a letter describing the Czech Christmas tradition of carp killing. He doesn't know anything about it and one day he leaves his flat in very late December and suddenly there are all these people in strange clothes with barrels full of fish and they are killing these poor animals. So he writes, for example, about this and says "how can they do that, and how can they eat it even after that!". And then they all disappear suddenly. And it's like when an anthropologist comes on a strange tribe of a different nation."

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**Yes, I know that can be very traumatic custom for an outside observer to witness. But George, or Jiří, is also able to bring a focus on serious aspects of Czech culture and history.**

“He describes, for example, art exhibitions in the Veletržní Palace. But the same palace was actually used for the deportation of Jewish citizens in the 1940s. And he observes this kind of reversal of fortune and he actually serves as a kind of catalyst for the family events. He doesn't know much what to do with it but he can observe it and describe it, so he's a kind of outsider coming inside and then he slowly starts to understand.”

**As you're writing about these relationships between various couples or triangles over such a long period, it certainly must make some observations about the political situation.**

“Yes, some Czech readers ask about the view of Czech political history. I'm personally not really interested in politics as everyday politics. The hero, Josef, is jailed for about ten years but within the book this period isn't really described, partly because there are a lot of books that describe this already and partly because if you want to go into that period you would really have to be very historically precise and I didn't want to write an historical book.”

**But I think you've used your own family history to an extent.**

“From a personal point of view one of my uncles was jailed for about a year. He had a small restaurant in Malá Strana under Prague Castle with his partner. And when the communists got to power they asked him to voluntarily pass it onto the state and he refused to do that so they locked him up for one year, only for a year, he wasn't a political prisoner; they let him go and they said he could be a manager in his own restaurant. And he told me when I was a kid - well, the silver cutlery had already been stolen - so they didn't want to do that. But it triggered in his partner some psychological illness and in a couple of years he stopped recognising family and he ended his life in a psychiatric hospital. But, on the other hand, another uncle was a communist party member, he actually joined the communist party before the war. So you have certain personal things there as well. But of course, I was a kid and you only recognise when you are older the tragedies which are under the surface.”

**The general tone of the book is rather a tragic and sad one.**

“I suppose so, yes, because that generation, I think that to a certain extent people still don't know how to deal with them, whether they should recognise their efforts or not. There is a discussion, but in my opinion it doesn't go anywhere and I don't think it will ever go anywhere because the Czech way to do things is to forget them.”

**You spent ten years in London, and amongst other things you studied English Literature at Kings College, and subsequently taught literature at Charles University. To what extent do you think you were influenced by your very profound knowledge of literature in English?**

“Well, I wasn't aware of this until the reviews started. It was a lasting influence but I didn't know it might be engrained in my literary views, but it seems that it is. The Czech critics say it and they are probably right. It has a positive effect probably that it made my book richer, but also a negative effect because some Czech editors didn't like it and said I should rewrite the book because it doesn't sound too Czech. “I studied English Literature and I enjoyed it and influences would be numerous, from Joseph Conrad even to medieval literature. Because as a writer I think I learnt most from Chaucer and others like him because from a technical point of view it's extremely interesting and inspirational.”

*rest of interview on <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/books/tale-of-success-for-pupil-of-chaucer>*

**REMARKS**

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