



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázk
Association
for International
Affairs

Newsletter

European program

6/2009

1 – 15 March 2009

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

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Croatia: Road Almost Clear?

Katarína Lokšová, Marián Zachar

After a recent visit of Mirek Topolánek in the region of Western Balkans, it is clear that the only country that has real chances of entering the EU in a relatively short time horizon is Croatia. In spite of Topolánek's warning that ceasing enlargement is a "road to hell", the situation does not look promising for the region. Even though Croatia's membership in the Union is supported by other European top politicians, French President and German Chancellor are not too keen on the idea of accepting other Western Balkans countries until the fate of the Lisbon Treaty is known. The Czech Republic and other countries which support enlargement antagonize this opinion stating that "Croatia should not become a victim of this process".

Croatia submitted its official application for EU membership 6 years ago and its entry is expected year 2011. The country meets most of the Copenhagen criteria; both economic and political ones (see Croatia 2005 Progress Report). From the economical point of view, Croatia has been long seen as an island of political stability in the region. However, the unsettled maritime border conflict with Slovenia in the Gulf of Piran remains a problem in the EU entry talks. Efforts for its resolution culminate in these days, when a mediation group headed by Martti Ahtisaari was established. Its task is to formulate a proposal for this row's solution before the Hague International Court of Justice. The establishment of the group was demanded by the Slovenians, who are largely against Croatia's membership in the EU. According to the Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, this is Croatia's last chance to stick to accession timetable. However Croats themselves do not estimate the possible date of settlement and rather count on un-blocking of accession talks.

Energy and Boundaries of Czech Presidency's Possibilities

(An excerpt from an analysis published on PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ)

Ivan Kováč

In January almost all Europeans and their countries found out that energy is at the moment one of the key topics in the EU. In fact it is so important, that it could become the priority of all presidencies in the horizon of several upcoming years. The Czech government is very actively engaged in tackling the energy situation.

Generally it is true that any dependence on external factors, which we cannot directly influence, is dangerous and risky in the long term. The danger and risk increase when a field of such importance as energy is concerned. There is no point in highlighting the meaning of this phenomenon in our everyday life – households in Bulgaria and factories in Slovakia could write novels on this topic. It is therefore apparent that energy risks pose serious problems because of their consequences. Any thoughts about EU's future, its prosperity, safety and protection of its inhabitants cannot omit the issue of energy security. However the Russia-Ukraine conflict pointed to the largest insidiousness which can occur in the field of energy resources supplies from alien sources. A bilateral Russia-Ukraine conflict about the price of gas and transit charges was "paid" by several EU member countries. This state is not acceptable in the future term and should not be tolerated today either. [Analysis continues here](#) (in Czech only)

EU-USA: an Era of New Cooperation?

(An excerpt from an analysis published on PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ)

Miroslav Benáček

On 20 January 2009 Barack Obama was inaugurated the 44th President of the USA. High representatives of a number of countries as well as masses of common people welcomed this change enthusiastically. The arrival of a new American President has probably never been accompanied by that many expectations. But are these legitimate? Can we really predict a crucial change in the relations between the US and its European partners?

Even though the historically first Afro-American President has only been in his office for a very limited time and therefore it is hard to evaluate and seriously predict his following steps, one thing is already sure. During his pre-election campaign, Obama promised much more than he is currently capable of fulfilling and at a time of economic downturn, he will at least have to postpone some of his agenda from his position of President "Saviour". However some poignant foreign policy issues cannot be put off and the deepening of relations with Europe is for sure one of them.

How much will the traditional transatlantic link be strengthened is not only up to the US, but rather to Europe or the European Union itself. For the time being, Bush's unilateral policy seems to be a thing of the past. The question is for how long. If the European Union fails to show itself as a strong and reliable partner, that apart from poetic rhetoric is also capable of investing in real cooperation, then Obama's promises of deepening of mutual partnership could also remain in the category of pre-election "hype". [Analysis continues here](#) (in Czech only)

Comments on Recent News

Gaza Donors' Conference

A long proclaimed conference to support the war-destroyed Gaza Strip reconstruction took place in Egypt at the beginning of March. Its participants, including Czech Minister Schwarzenberg, promised a donation of \$4,481 billion (of which 554,1 mil. from the European Commission). However, a bigger part will probably go outside the Gaza Strip. The start of reconstruction is also blocked by unyieldingness of Israel and Egypt to fully open the border with Gaza, as well as by the unwillingness of several countries to invest in the area controlled by Hamas. [More](#)

Prague Hosted the Largest Event of the Presidency

On 5 and 6 March Prague welcomed the European Summit of Regions and Cities, organised by the Union's Committee of Regions. The conference was attended by hundreds of European municipality delegations as well as the highest representatives of EU. The conference itself maybe deserves attention as the largest act of the Czech Presidency; however, it failed to come up with new issues. Therefore a regular citizen probably appreciated the rich accompanying cultural programme more. [More](#)

EUFOR Mission in Chad Terminates

Another informal meeting of Defence Ministers discussed primarily foreign military operations in Chad, Central African Republic, Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Chad and Central African Republic missions, in which 26 member states were participating and which protected Darfur refugees, are drawing to an end and are to be transmitted to UN mandate. The operation in Bosnia shall be transformed to a training and advisory mission. Ministers also addressed the development of EU military capacities. [More](#)

EP Urges the Presidency to Adopt a Declaration on Tibet

On 12 March, the European Parliament adopted a declaration on European-Chinese-Tibetan relations. At this exact time, Tibetans are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against China. The EP calls on the Czech Presidency to adopt a declaration, which will appeal towards the reopening of Chinese-Tibetan dialogue. This would certainly affect the realisation of the projected EU-China summit, which was postponed to an unspecified date after the meeting of French President Sarkozy with the Dalai Lama. [More](#)

Interviews

The recent difficult situation constitutes a great challenge to domestic market and to the Monetary Union, because it cannot be ruled out that some country, especially if falling into an extra difficult situation, might not want to respect the principles of the common market, e.g. by advantaging some of their homeland companies to ease their survival or the situation on labour market. This risk is in fact very probable. There is also a danger to the Monetary Union, because countries functioning with a huge indebtedness and with a very low economic activity might pay no respect to

the Stability and Growth Pact principles and maybe in an extreme case, they would even consider a step back to national currency. Both cases would be a disaster not only for common market and the Monetary Union, but also for the whole European integration.

Luděk Urban, Jean Monnet professor at the Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 12th March 2009. [Complete interview](#)

We will certainly experience a smoother transition (from Czech to Swedish Presidency) than in case of the French Presidency. The present issue n.1 is the economic crisis and here are both Czech and Swedish government very close: they both want to promote four basic freedoms as well as protect EU against protectionism. Smooth transition will also be on the visible sight - it cannot be assumed that Swedish Prime Minister or Czech Prime Minister Topolánek would act as the French President. (...) Sarkozy is a powerful personality and a charismatic politician with strong opinions and therefore it's clear enough, that he is henceforth going to express them. Other thing is how other countries accept his beliefs. It is obvious that Europe listens differently when Sarkozy speaks, and differently when Topolánek does. When smaller states end their Presidency, they again have to become used to the fact that they won't remain listened to by the others.

Mats Braun, Institute of International Relations, in an interview for PREDSEDNICTVI.CZ on 12th March 2009. [Complete interview](#)

Interesting Publications

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

The essay "[Die EU, die Hamas und die Krise im israelisch-palästinensischen Friedensprozess](#)" provides an unkind balance of European politics in relation to the Israeli-Palestine conflict since the Hamas election victory in 2006 up to now. The author seeks reasons of the failure of the peace process and promotes certain steps, by which EU should contribute to the improvement of the situation in the area.

Centre for European Policy Studies

The publication "[Replacing and Displacing the Law: the Europeanization of Judicial Power](#)" deals with influences of political and social processes on the Europeanization of judicial power. The emphasis is put on the situation after 9/11, when the EU in scope of the war on terrorism policy modified its approach. The author also focuses on the reluctance of national courts to give up their authority in favour of the European Court of Justice.

Open Europe

The publication "[Out of control? Measuring a decade of EU regulation](#)" offers a critical view of regulation policy, which has been frequently mentioned during the financial crisis. It points out on the example of Great Britain the negative effects of EU regulation and calls for changing the recent trend. "Ministers must use all of their power to fend off waves of regulations coming from EU, despite of the possible unpopularity in Brussels," authors write.

Invitations

Workshop: Transatlantic Relations – Historic Perspective and Future Development

When: 19 March from 5 pm

Where: Eurocentrum Praha, Jungmannova 24, Praha 1

Organiser: Eurocentrum Praha

Guest: Tomáš Weiss – EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy

[More](#)

Conference: Accomplishments and Failures of Civic Society in Central Europe – Twenty Years after the Fall of Communism

When: 20 March from 9 am

Where: Richterův dům, Malé náměstí 11, Praha 1

Organiser: New York University in Prague

Guests (e.g.): Martin Palouš – Permanent Representative to the UN for the Czech Republic, Jiří Pehe – political scientist, director of NYU in Prague

[More](#)

Scientific Conference: Lisbon Treaty's Impact on the Czech Legal Order

When: 27 March from 9:15 am

Where: Metropolitan University, Prokopova 16, Praha 3

Organiser: Metropolitan University Prague

Guests: Pavel Svoboda – Minister and Chairman of the Council for Legislation of the Czech Republic, Jakub Camrda – Judge at the Czech Supreme Administrative Court and others

[More](#)

Expected Events

European Council Meeting in Brussels

From 19 to 20 March spring European Council meeting will take place in Brussels. Its focus will traditionally be on economic topics. The summit will be dedicated to e.g. questions of social growth and employment in relation to the impact of the economic crisis. Another discussed topic, on which the EU countries only hardly agree, is the use of money from the globalisation fund, which should cover the consequences of economic problems. The Czech Presidency will also suggest that the EU provides the International Monetary Fund with a loan amounting to 75 or 100 billion dollars in order to increase its credit capacity. [More](#)

EU Commissioner to Visit Cuba

From 18 to 19 March Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel will be visiting Cuba in order to talk with Havana leaders about the possibilities of development cooperation. Discussion topics include e.g. food safety, economic cooperation, environment,

climatic changes and other. This is another step after last year's lift of sanctions, which was not welcome by the Czech Republic. [More](#)

Brussels Forum 2009

From 20 to 22 March Brussels will host a conference, which is annually attended by top politicians, entrepreneurs and intellectuals from Europe and the US, who dedicate themselves to current issues of transatlantic relations. This year's agenda includes e.g. civic liberties, globalisation or the Black Sea region. Guests include Senator John McCain, President of the World Bank Robert B. Zoellick or Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov. [More](#)

European Election 2009

New Green Party in EP Elections

Michal Vít

The number of parties willing to win electors' favour in European Parliament election has increased again at the beginning of March. As we already informed here, the intention to participate in the election was appraised mainly by right-wing parties. At the end of February, the chairmanship of the Green Party approved the ballot for EP elections and surprisingly, [Jan Dusík](#), current Deputy Minister of Environment, was appointed as the leading candidate. He thereby surpassed the favoured MP Kateřina Jacques, who, according to the nominations, had the biggest chance to be appointed as the number one candidate. The third one on the ballot became Přemysl Rabas, another current Green Party MP.

A part of green party members, unsatisfied with the present GP course, also intend to participate in the EP election, standing for [Democratic Green Party](#) (DGP). This new political body hasn't clarified its ballot yet, but the presumed number one candidate is Jan Vondruž. The outlooks for both GP and DGP are not very optimistic, considering the very probable splitting of the not very numerous environmentally-oriented electorates. Contrary to right-wing parties with clearly defined European orientation, "green" parties haven't offered any diversity in their political programs yet and thus they are for the electors relatively "illegible".

Analysis of the ČSSD EP Election Program

Vít Dostál

The Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) introduced its agenda, in which it presents itself before the EP elections. It consists of two parts; the first one deals with the fight against the economic crisis and it is focused primarily on internal measures, while the second part is made of common manifesto of the Party of European Socialists (PES) for European elections, called "People First, a New Direction for Europe", already dealing with this European theme.

ČSSD openly presents that EP elections are not only about European topics. The agenda document clearly states, that the election will be the second round of plebiscite on Mirek Topolánek's government.

The PES Manifesto advocates the European social model and appeals to its strengthening in the time of economic recession. Socialists claim, that at a time when the conservatives blindly serve to the market and its rules, they want to create the future and present themselves as an active and progressive political stream. PES considers the Lisbon Treaty an inevitable instrument of progress and counts on its early validity.

The socialists demand a reform of financial institutions and their greater regulation. They support restrictions of managers' salaries, greater transparency of financial sector and stock markets, end of the so-called tax shelters and loan regulation. Instruments of growth according to PES shall include investments in green transport, energetic infrastructure development, requalification and mobility of apprentices and elders. In one part of the agenda, ČSSD also mentions that it shall promote nuclear technology at European level, considering it an instrument of achieving energy independence. Socialists want to strengthen the regulation of monopolies at European level and thus ensure gaining control over the development of the prices of electric energy, gas and telecommunication services.

According to PES, the European Union should advocate primarily peace and sustainable economic and social development. Socialists anticipate strengthening of multilateral approach to global politics. PES is positive about EU enlargement and it also supports European edging initiatives for countries around the Black Sea and in Eastern Europe. ČSSD's contribution is the comment on American components of the anti-missile defence system, the approval of which should reflect the major opinion in society.

Generally, one might say that both Czech and European socialists bet, when making the agenda, on answering the proceeding financial crisis and economic downfall. The document criticises the recent market system for low level of regulation and socialists support strengthening of its control and a more active role of states or European institutions. It may be anticipated, that if these topics are communicated strongly enough, then it may come to a significant strengthening of the socialist fraction in the EP.

Authors' opinions are expressed in this newsletter. They needn't necessarily reflect views of Association for International Affairs.

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