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Briefing Paper 5/2010

Czech Foreign Policy – The Prospects of
Change in the Wake of 2010 Parliamentary
Elections

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June 2010

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**Association for International Affairs,
EUROPEUM Institute for European
Policy**



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Executive Summary

- Prospective members (ODS, TOP 09, and VV) of the governing coalition **share similar views** on Czech foreign policy, thereby they will easily reach a consensus on foreign policy.
- The new government is likely to **maintain a foreign policy course** - as set out in 2002 - in which Prague pursues a **realist EU policy** and acts as a **reliable ally of the US**.
- **Foreign policy priorities** will include energy security, policy towards Eastern Europe, human rights, and economic diplomacy.
- The government will attempt to **repair our battered image** not only in the European Union (as a result of the botched Czech EU Presidency) but also in NATO (due to lingering uncertainties about our long-term commitment to the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan).
- The Czech diplomacy will remain **vigilant in its policy vis-à-vis Russia**.
- The Czech Foreign and Defense Minister will be Karel **Schwarzenberg** and Alexandr **Vondra**, respectively, while the post of the Minister for EU Affairs will be disbanded.



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Foreword

Releasing a study predicting future trends in Czech foreign policy at the time of intense talks between political parties may seem to be a rather premature if not overly daring undertaking.

The Association for International Affairs (AMO) and EUROPEUM, the prominent Czech foreign-policy think-tanks, decided to make such an attempt based on the notion of predictability embedded in Czech politics and political platforms of Czech parties, who are now in talks aimed at forming a new government. With their more than ten-year tradition, both think-tanks are active participants in the contemporary Czech foreign policy debate. We believe that our study will encourage further public debate on what kind of foreign policy our country should have. Although foreign policy enjoys little or no attention from Czech voters and politicians alike, it can to a large extent influence the future course of the Czech Republic in the long run. Therefore, we hope that the study at hand will help raise awareness of foreign policy issues affecting our country.

This study is intended for those who would like to know what to expect from the new Czech government in the realm of foreign policy. Soon enough, a reader will be able to confront our findings with foreign policy priorities as enumerated in the coalition agreement and government's declaration of priorities. But perhaps the most effective way of measuring the accuracy of our predictions will be foreign policy initiatives the new government sets out to pursue.

We are fully aware of the possibility that the ongoing government talks might collapse and the coalition government as envisaged in its current form will not be formed. That said, however, any failure to form a new government will hardly be blamed on the discord over foreign policy.

Foreign policy in party platforms of the prospective coalition members

The **Civic Democratic Party** (ODS) has unveiled a foreign policy manifesto based on the promotion of a strong transatlantic link and the pursuit of pragmatic foreign policy driven by economic interests. A shift in ODS's EU policy after the departure of Vaclav Klaus, the party's founder and long-time chairman, has led to the softening of ideological opposition to the Union, while recognizing the country's EU membership as an irreversible political reality. The post-Klaus ODS acknowledges that the country has benefited from its accession to the single market as well as financial subsidies from the EU budget. The 2010 party platform stipulates that foreign policy should be utilized to increase country's security, prosperity and freedom. In this regard, the ODS emphasizes the need to continue liberalization of international trade, rejects protectionism and regulations in the EU, and strives to enhance economic diplomacy. The ODS considers our alliance with Washington as a cornerstone of our security policy, while it calls for more burden sharing



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between Europe and the US. The ODS supports EU enlargement as a means of spreading freedom, stability and free trade. As far as Russia is concerned, the ODS campaign platform mentions the war in Georgia and our country's energy dependency on Moscow as negative instances of Russia's rising influence in Europe, which needs to be contained.

The **TOP 09** party has presented a foreign policy manifesto based on the personal authority of its chairman Karel Schwarzenberg and his foreign policy priorities when he served as a foreign minister in 2007-2009. The party platform takes into account broad economic and security interests of the Czech Republic, while stressing the need to meet our obligations of membership in NATO and the EU. In addition, TOP 09 calls for promotion of democracy and human rights in the world. TOP 09 is in favor of continued enlargement of both NATO and the EU, especially with an aim to bring in the Western Balkan countries. The party supports the current decision making mechanisms as established by the Lisbon Treaty. Addressing energy security, the party platform calls for greater diversification of energy suppliers and transit routes. Another way of enhancing our energy security, according to TOP 09, is through developing a common European energy policy, the party wants to promote. Finally, TOP 09 would like to involve the parliamentary opposition in formulating a long-term foreign policy concept.

The **Veci Verejné (VV)** party emphasizes the need to pursue foreign policy based on equality, dialogue and cooperation. The party strives to implement its foreign policy manifesto not only within the framework of the EU but also through maintaining an active and loyal alliance with the US and other NATO members while deepening friendly ties with our neighbors. The VV defines itself as a pro-European party, who seeks to actively participate in resolving problems within the framework of the Union. The party demands that new member states should be granted equal status with the old ones, especially in the area of agriculture, liberalization of the internal market and easier access to EU funds. According to the VV, our energy security should be best attained through forging a greater unity among EU member states in their dealings with key suppliers (e.g. Russia) as well as improving energy infrastructure. In order to set a date for the adoption of the single European currency, the VV proposes to conduct a thorough expert analysis first to ensure an easy transition. The party explicitly opposes Turkish membership in the Union. The VV is a proponent of the creation of independent European armed forces. In order to meet obligations under our NATO membership, the party is determined to increase our troops deployments abroad even at the cost of reducing defense spending at the time of the economic crisis. The VV also declares its commitment to universal human rights.

Having compared the party platforms of the three prospective coalition members, this study has not identified any major disagreement in their foreign policy outlooks. Differences do exist, however, but they manifest themselves mostly either in the degree of emphasis the parties put on certain issues or their disparate foreign policy priorities, especially concerning the process of European integration. Although some of the foreign policy goals championed by the VV (e.g. campaigning against Turkish membership in the EU, creating an independent European army) are not in sync with the other two political parties. Nevertheless, those issues will hardly pose any serious political risk for the new government since they will be either brushed aside (e.g. accession talks with Turkey) or not discussed at all (e.g. European Army).



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Continuity in Czech foreign policy

It can be argued that since our accession to the EU there has been little or no attempt to formulate long-term foreign policy goals based on a broad agreement among key political actors. Therefore, a guarantor of the continuity in Czech foreign policy has to a large extent been the state bureaucracy. It is no wonder then that this continuity has been limited only to a few key foreign policy priorities (the transatlantic link, human rights, energy security and diversification of energy sources, Eastern Europe and the Balkans).

Prime Minister-elect Petr Nečas has already stated that he wants to make Czech foreign policy more predictable and coherent. One can expect the new government to increase its profile in international affairs in general and the EU in particular, where the Czech Republic will have to restore its damaged credibility as a result of the botched Czech EU Presidency.

At this point, it seems that with almost a three-fifth majority in the parliament, the government might not feel compelled enough to strike a broad deal with the opposition on foreign policy. As for strategic issues, such as our country's role in the EU and troops deployments abroad, the government and opposition will have difficult time finding some common ground.

As the new government will move to draft a new foreign policy concept, the document is likely to prioritize energy security, engagement in Eastern Europe (based on the EU's Eastern Partnership and bilateral transformation assistance programs) and its commitment to the transatlantic link.

European Union

Being more EU-friendly than the previous government of PM Mirek Topolánek, the new government can be expected to steer our EU policy towards a greater engagement in Europe.

This expected pro-European shift in Czech foreign policy will be possible due to several factors. First, the current power struggle inside the ODS will likely result in the victory of the Europe-realists wing (represented by Petr Nečas and Alexandr Vondra) over the Europe-skeptics wing (a view shared by the followers of current Czech President Vaclav Klaus and especially ODS senators). Moreover, given its weakened position in the new cabinet, the ODS could ill afford to ignore a generally more pro-EU stance shared by the two junior coalition members. Nevertheless, for the VV, as part of the governing coalition, it will be quite difficult to defend its ambitious EU agenda.

The Czech EU policy will mostly focus on economic issues, such as dealing with the impacts of the global economic crisis, regulations and the common market, and reforming the EU budget. Although the government will try to raise its profile in the economic sphere, its room for maneuver is rather limited since our country remains outside of the Eurozone. At this point, it is still quite uncertain as to what the new government's strategy on adopting the single European currency will be. The new government will most certainly push hard



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to meet the Maastricht criteria but less out of concern for the early adoption of euro rather than speedy recovery of the Czech public finances.

It is quite unlikely that the Czech Republic will not see the introduction of euro under the watch of the new center-right coalition. At the same time, it is entirely conceivable that the government might want to set a final date for the adoption of euro and as a necessary final step the government will try to fully integrate the country's economy into the ERM 2 exchange rate system.

In addition, the government will support further EU enlargement into the Western Balkans (the coalition members will most likely disagree over Turkey as a candidate country). The Czech Republic will also continue to promote the Eastern Partnership (a set of policies aimed at deepening cooperation between the EU and its neighbors in Eastern Europe). With Budapest and Warsaw at the helm of the EU in 2011, the Eastern Partnership will only grow in importance.

Given pressing concerns over Europe's energy dependency on outside suppliers, the Czech government can be expected to focus on the promotion of EU's common energy security policy while building up on the activities of the Czech EU Presidency (e.g. support for the construction of the Nabucco pipeline and effort to resurrect nuclear energy).

In light of ever expanding cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs, the new government will have little choice but to respond to these new challenges. As the EU is gearing up to intensify legislation harmonization, however, Prague can be expected to be reactive rather than proactive in its response.

Transatlantic relations

The new government will tend to cultivate close ties with the United States, whereby it will strive to make sure that NATO's new strategic concept contains a strong emphasis on the internal cohesion of the Alliance. Similarly, Prague will be an active participant in NATO's military operations abroad, especially in Afghanistan.

The new government will strive to deepen economic integration with the USA while throwing its weight behind the Transatlantic Economic Council. At the same time, however, Prague's push for further liberalization of international trade might be met with some reservations or even a mild rebuke from the US government.

Our relations with Canada will be dominated by Prague's effort to remove visa requirement at the bilateral as well as the EU level.

Finally, the Czech Republic will seek as much participation as possible in the revised plans to deploy American missile defenses in Europe. Considering that some candidates for the cabinet posts in the new government were personally involved in the missile defense talks with the Bush administration, it can be inferred that the new government will probably



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ask for some of the components of the new anti-missile shield to be based in the Czech Republic.

Russia

For the new government, Russia will not probably be one of its top foreign policy priorities. During the last televised debate prior to the elections, Petr Nečas, who is slated to become the prime minister, maintained that the Czech diplomacy should not completely forsake the promotion of human rights and democracy in authoritarian countries. Therefore, Prague will not hesitate to criticize Russia for its authoritarian tendencies while demanding greater democratization in the country. In this regard, a soon-to-be-made appointment of the new Czech ambassador in Moscow could prove to be of significance. The rumored move of current Czech Ambassador in Washington Petr Kolář to Moscow may in fact lead to the intensification of Czech activities in promoting rule of law and human rights in Russia.

As a preeminent energy exporter Russia will be at the forefront of Prague's effort to diversify suppliers both for its domestic and European markets. On the other hand, one can expect that Moscow will show less interest in the Czech Republic than was the case during the Czech EU Presidency or at the time of intensive wrangling over the deployment of the American radar station in our country.

In the coming months, the new Czech government will have a chance to implant its cautious, even wary approach towards Russia into the Euratlantic structures and the way they interact with Moscow. First, the opportunity may present itself with the ongoing EU-Russia talks on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in which the Czechs might demand a greater emphasis on human rights much to the great dismay of Moscow but also some of our EU partners. Second, NATO countries are about to start drafting a new strategic concept, which should devote substantial attention to Brussels' partnership with Russia. One can however expect that the Czech government will be less inclined to support broadening of cooperation with Russia as was advocated by the group of wise men headed by former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Human rights and transformation assistance

Promotion of democracy and human rights, a trademark of Czech diplomacy, has been losing steam since the fall of the Topolánek's government due to budget cuts and change in foreign policy priorities. It can be expected that the new government will keep transformation assistance as one of its foreign policy priorities while making it an integral tool of Czech diplomacy. The government will maintain mutually beneficial channels of communications between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and non-governmental sector up and running since such a partnership between the government and NGOs is instrumental in making transformation assistance programs more effective.



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The selection of ten priority countries for government's transformation assistance will probably remain the same, while Prague will prioritize countries, whose political and economic stability is of crucial interest to the Czech Republic (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia) at the expense of far away dictatorships (e.g. Cuba, Myanmar).

The funds available for Czech development aid programs have been shrinking due to budget cuts. In contrast to human rights, it can be argued that the new government will not consider it as a priority and the funds will be reduced. Dwindling development aid might also reduce the Czech Republic's participation in international cooperation, for instance, as part of the EU. It can be expected, therefore, that the new government will use development aid to pursue its own particular economic interests.

Who gets what? Dividing cabinet posts

The safest bet is that Karel Schwarzenberg, the leader of TOP 09, will become the foreign minister. This is not only due to the fact that he served as a foreign minister during our EU Presidency, but also that other parties do not have a personality of Schwarzenberg's stature, perhaps with a sole exception of Alexandr Vondra.

A candidate for the defense minister is rumored to be Vondra, who has already indicated his interest in the job. As the biggest party in the coalition it is likely that the ODS will seek to gain some of the power ministries and the ministry of defense for Vondra seems as a logical choice.

The days of the Ministry for European Affairs seem to be numbered with the new government bent on its dissolution. The initial idea of having the post of a deputy prime minister responsible for EU affairs was put into question in the aftermath of the fall of the Topolánek's government.

Subsequently, neither Štefan Füle nor Juraj Chmiel has succeeded in breathing a new life into the Minister for EU Affairs in the wake of the Czech EU Presidency. With the dissolution of the ministry, a new prime minister will likely retain some of its staff to assist the PM and the government's Committee for the EU.

Should the government decide to dismantle the Ministry for Regional Development it is likely that the Office of the Government will inherit management of European funds.

Conclusion

Should a new government be formed on the basis of an overlap between party platforms of the ODS, TOP 09, and VV, the basic continuity of Czech foreign policy with its roots in the 2003 Concept of Foreign Policy is likely to be preserved.



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While the ODS has a consistent, well-developed foreign policy platform, and TOP 09 has Karel Schwarzenberg, the question remains what impact will the newcomer VV have on Czech foreign policy. Although its foreign policy platform in many respects correlates with the foreign policy thinking of the other two parties, the VV still lacks a credible personality, who could convincingly sell party's foreign policy agenda (perhaps with a sole exception of former Czech foreign minister Josef Zieleniec who is loosely affiliated with the party). Potential conflicts may arise over particular aspects of the Czech EU policy, which will be handled by individual ministries rather than the MFA or the Ministry for European Affairs, as was the case until quite recently.



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Association for International Affairs

The Association for International Affairs (AMO) is a non-governmental organization which was founded in order to pursue research and offer education in the field of international relations. AMO's main mission is to contribute to a deeper understanding of international course of events. Thanks to its activities and more than ten years of existence, AMO is perceived as one of the leading independent Czech think-tanks specialized in foreign policy.

In order to reach its goals the Association:

- conceives and publishes studies and analyses;
- organizes international conferences, expert workshops, round tables, public discussions;
- organizes educational projects;
- presents critical opinions and commentaries on current issues for domestic and foreign media;
- creates better conditions for the emergence of a new generation of experts;
- supports the interest of general public in international relations;
- cooperates with a wide array of other home and foreign institutions..

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan and independent institute. It focuses on the issues of European integration and its impact on the transformation of political, economic and legal milieu in the Czech Republic. EUROPEUM strives to contribute to a long-lasting development of democracy, security, stability, freedom and solidarity across Europe. EUROPEUM formulates opinions and offers alternatives to internal reforms in the Czech Republic with a view of ensuring her full-fledged membership and respected position in the European Union.