

PRIORITIES OF THE CZECH PRESIDENCY

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In the highly changeable world of the 21st century, it is becoming clear that the European Union's success depends upon having the ability to flexibly respond to current problems, and to take full advantage of its economic, cultural and human potential. With this in mind, from the very outset of its preparations, the Czech Republic chose '**Europe without Barriers**' as the symbolic motto of its Presidency: a Europe without internal economic, cultural and value barriers for individuals, entrepreneurs and economic entities; a Europe open to the world, but not defenceless against illegal activities and attacks. In the present efforts to stabilise the EU's economies, excessive regulation and an increased level of protectionism must be avoided, above all. The European Union must not give up its strategic goals in favour of short-term stabilisation measures.

Only an economically strong and cohesive EU without internal barriers, building on its values and roots, will be able to address complex global issues and establish its position in today's world. Hence, the Czech Presidency's main priority areas are **Economy, Energy and the European Union in the World.**

Economy

Urgent measures have already been taken in order to restore the proper functioning of financial systems and the confidence of economic agents. Implementing further steps to enhance transparency and stability of financial markets will be an important goal in the upcoming period. Taking into account that the financial crisis has already had impacts on the real economy, the primary task during the Czech Presidency was and still is to prevent any further deepening of the crisis and to revive the economic growth of the EU economies.

Even in this difficult economic situation, the Czech Presidency wants to put emphasis on the development of human capital through supporting education, research and development, and by freeing reserves in the internal market. The issue is, above all, to remove any barriers that still stand in the way of the full utilisation of all internal market freedoms, namely the free movement of workers and services, as well as the extraordinarily promising movement of knowledge. The European Union must also strive to dismantle external barriers. It cannot put up with the stalling of the process of world trade liberalisation, with persisting obstacles to access to other markets, unfair competition, or insufficient protection of intellectual and industrial property.

Energy

Energy security is a basic prerequisite for the functioning of the EU economies. In light of the EU's increasing dependence on energy imports from the surrounding world, it acquires a special urgency. The EU's goal in this regard is to achieve a greater territorial diversification of suppliers, a broader range of utilised sources, an enhancement of the range of renewable resources and the creation of a truly unified internal energy market in the EU which would allow for solidarity in crisis situations. Overall, the path of reducing the economy's energy intensity must be pursued, as well as reducing the economy's impact on the environment at European and global level.

European Union in the World

In terms of the EU's international policy position, its stable transatlantic tie is of particular long-term significance. Talks with the representatives of the new US administration and the further development of the transatlantic dialogue in the key spheres of security, economy, energy and climate protection, will be of major importance for the EU's interests.

In the context of Russia's recent steps, which have evoked a number of serious questions, the EU must approach the upcoming negotiations about a new partnership agreement with Russia with a unanimous position. The increasing importance of the cooperation with the Eastern European region,

especially with Ukraine, and the development of relations with countries in the Caucasian region, has sped up the preparation of the Eastern Partnership. The Presidency will pay special attention to this Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. In the first half of 2009, accession negotiations with a strategic partner - Turkey - will continue. Among the Western Balkan countries, Croatia is approaching EU membership, and the Presidency will do everything to ensure that EU enlargement with this country takes place as soon as possible. From the strategic perspective, it is necessary for the other Balkan countries to comply with the conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process to be able to apply for future EU membership. The Czech Presidency will also continue to develop the Southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy and to improve relations with the partner countries included in this.

Bilateral Relations

Bilateral relations between our countries are traditionally good and there are no problematic issues which could hamper their further development. On the contrary, the opportunities have been even strengthened by both countries being part of the European internal market.

Therefore, we encourage business people of both countries to get together as often as possible. We attract Czech companies to take part in fairs and exhibitions in Cyprus we participated at TAXIDI Exhibition that is specialized in tourism industry and at the Cyprus International Fair, which is the main fair event in Cyprus. We also organise seminars and workshops in areas of mutual interest and provide all interested parties with information and contacts according to their needs. Practically each Czech official visit to Cyprus is accompanied by businesspeople.

We really welcome the establishment of The Cyprus - Czech Republic Business Association under the auspices of the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry last October. We are happy to see among its members, Cypriot companies having long-term experience with our country as well as the

companies looking for new business contacts. Few days ago a similar Czech partner, The Czech - Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, was established in Prague. We believe that these two business oriented bodies can play a vital role in further development of our bilateral economic relations.

The cooperation has to be supported not only at bilateral level but also well coordinated at European level. It is a must particularly now when the world economy is going through very difficult times - financial crisis, recession, climate changes. The challenges we are facing require a common approach based on European policies.

We are looking forward to the future, sharing our experiences and discovering the beauty of both our countries. I wish that our mission here in Cyprus, the Czech Embassy together with your University can contribute to the successful partnership between our countries.