



**OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC
SECTION FOR THE CZECH REPUBLIC'S PRESIDENCY OF
THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
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Evaluation of the activities of the Deputy Prime Minister for the European Affairs in coordinating preparations to date for the Czech Republic's Presidency of the EU Council

(Prague, 24 July 2007) – The Czech Republic is to hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2009, taking over this role from France before passing on the baton to Sweden. The initial preparations were set in train in 2005, but it was not until the position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs was established at the beginning of 2007 that the pace really picked up. Alexandr Vondra, as the Deputy Prime Minister for the European Affairs, was quick to put together a **stable team** of experts in the EU matters. Some of them played a direct hand in the organization of past presidencies held by other EU Member States, and therefore they have been able to contribute their first-hand, practical experience to the preparations for the Czech Presidency. This team has made significant headway as it deals with the strategic definition of themes and political priorities that will dominate the Czech Presidency. It is also forming a framework and backdrop for the organizational, administrative and communication requirements of the presidency not only in the Czech Republic, but also in Brussels and other Member States.

The team headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for the European Affairs has taken numerous specific steps in this respect, especially in **administrative and financial** matters. The individual ministries and the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU in Brussels will be temporarily reinforced with sufficient numbers of officials and diplomats to ensure that the Czech Presidency passes off smoothly. These members of staff are already making rigorous preparations in their fields of expertise and, where necessary, are intensively honing their language skills.

The Government has earmarked an additional CZK 1.9 billion over three years to cover the preparations and duration of the Presidency (CZK 200 million in 2007, CZK 700 million in 2008 and CZK 1 billion in 2009). Further resources are being devoted to the groundwork and implementation of the Presidency by central institutions out of their current budgets. In the upcoming preparatory period, funds from the Presidency's budget will be channelled primarily into securing conference facilities and services.

Besides chairing hundreds of meetings of the EU Council and working parties in Brussels and representing the EU elsewhere in the world, over the six months of its Presidency, the Czech Republic will host around **two hundred meetings and conferences**. The most significant will include approximately ten informal meetings of the EU Council at ministerial level. The team of the Deputy Prime Minister for the European Affairs is currently working closely with the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the European Union in order to finalize

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the form the Presidency's schedule will take. This timetable of key meetings to be held in the Czech Republic and Brussels will then be discussed with the General Secretariat of the Council and will become the cornerstone of the Presidency programme as a whole.

The current Government is working on the assumption that the Presidency is an occasion for the whole of the Czech Republic, and accordingly has plans to hold most of the Council's informal ministerial meetings in regional cities rather than in Prague. The Deputy Prime Minister's team, in cooperation with provincial governors and city mayors, is mapping out and assessing the opportunities offered by the individual regions as potential hosts of informal ministerial meetings and other activities. The final locations of ministerial events under the Presidency should be known by autumn 2007.

Besides singling out suitable conference facilities in Prague and the regions, the organizational team led by the Deputy Prime Minister for the European Affairs is working exhaustively on many other related facets of the Czech Presidency. The private business sector will play a major role in the preparations. In the second half of 2007, numerous public contracts and tenders will be advertised to cover the technical requirements and organization of conference facilities, interpreting services, transport and accommodation.

Well-thought-out, effective and precisely targeted **communications** are essential for the smooth course of the Czech Presidency. The team of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, fully aware of this, is putting the finishing touches to its communication concept. Communication principles, goals and resources will be drawn up, along with a system designed to coordinate all the parties involved. In principle, communications can be split into two main stages – the pre-Presidency period and the Presidency per se in the first half of 2009.

In the pre-Presidency period, communications will principally hinge on the objectives that the Czech Republic will pursue when it takes over the Presidency. During the Presidency, the focus will be on the prompt, effective and balanced dissemination of information about events in the European Union in all its areas of operation and about general European topics. Another weighty set of tasks during the Presidency involves the publication of information about the agenda, course and conclusions of individual ministerial meetings, conferences and other Presidency-related events in the Czech Republic. A Presidency logo, website and other elements designed to portray a uniform identity (the decoration of meeting rooms and adjoining public spaces, promotional items, etc.) will be prepared ahead of the Presidency.

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union can result in further value added for the Czech Republic: it is a unique opportunity to increase the visibility of the country and its individual regions within the European Union and in other countries around the world. In this respect, an important factor in communicating the Czech Presidency will be to project a positive image of the Czech Republic abroad. These efforts will be boosted during the Presidency by accompanying cultural and social events.

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We are also working intensively on the **content** of the Presidency. The prime tasks here are to set the key priorities and themes that are to be discussed at Council meetings, and to prepare for negotiations on a joint 18-month programme with France and Sweden. Besides its contact with these countries, the Presidency team is also drawing on the experience of other Member States of the European Union and monitoring their opinions. For the activities of the component of the Deputy Prime Minister's team responsible for the content of the Presidency, a key factor – in cooperation with other ministries and the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU in Brussels – is communication with the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council (which will prepare the first draft of the 18-month programme) and, naturally, the European Parliament.

The fundamental priorities of the Czech Presidency were set by the Government, through the Governmental Committee on the European Union, last February. The ambitions are by no means overstated; the priorities are based on realistic assessments of our capabilities and, in particular, on general developments within the Union. The main role of the country holding the presidency is to act as a rudder; Czech representatives will be self-confident and enterprising. The Government of the Czech Republic believes that it will have been successful if it manages to leave a 'Czech footprint' in several areas of the EU.

The slogan '*Europe without Barriers*' has been chosen as a **motto** which aptly expresses our view that certain areas of European integration remain unfinished. We believe obstructions exist both within the EU and in its external relations. Internally, the four freedoms are not implemented consistently (obstacles exist in the free movement of persons and services); externally, EU trade with third countries has not been genuinely liberalized. The slogan should feature in all the Czech Republic's activities during its Presidency. In addition, the Government has singled out six areas of topical importance and will strive to promote them in the first half of 2009. The number-one **priority** is the composite field of European *competitiveness*, the *four freedoms* – the freedom to provide services and the free movement of workers, goods and capital – and ultimately *open trade* with the world.

The other five priority areas are not ranked by any order of importance. They include the increasingly pressing issue of *energy* (to which we can add the attributes sustainable and safe), and an important theme that is sure to be tackled during the Czech Presidency – the reform of the EU *budget*, closely bound up with the future of the *agricultural policy*. The angle on common foreign policy is covered by transatlantic relations, the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. The further development of the area of freedom, security and justice is covered by a wide range of issues in the competence of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice. Not least, as it showed during the complex talks at the EU Summit in June, the Czech Republic is fully aware of the importance of *reforming EU institutions* and of the fact that it will evidently be dealing with the nomination for the new President of the European Commission and the High Representative for the CFSP.

Since preparations picked up speed in February 2007, there has been a lively **debate** about these priorities which follows two basic lines. On the first level, there are groups of

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ministerial representatives, of varying composition, plus other experts; they discuss and develop the individual priorities with the involvement of specialists from the team of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs. On the second level, there are debates with certain other key players. Notably, these include the Czech Parliament – the European and foreign committees of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies – as well as employers and trade unions, provincial and local authorities, and – not least – experts, academics and civil society. These consultations have borne fruit in the form of a greater stress on themes such as education, innovation and transport within the priority of competitiveness. In the future, there may be a certain reduction in the number of priorities, or we may replace some of them with others that become more topical. We are engaged in intensive consultations with our partners in the presidency Troika regarding possible common themes for the 18-month cycle and its overall character. The next steps to be taken by the team working on the priorities, once the updated version of the document on principal themes has been approved, will therefore focus on launching formal talks on the joint 18-month programme of the three presidencies in October this year.

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