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The Czech 2009 EU Council Presidency - A Starting Point Assessment

Věra Řiháčková, Zuzana Kasáková*
EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy

The Czech Republic is taking over the EU Council Presidency for the first time on January 1, 2009 after France. The administrative and logistic preparations have been extensive and only few doubt the Czech Presidency is going to be able to deliver well at the working level. The concerns voiced regarding the performance and ability of the Czech Presidency to mediate and broke the EU debate and deliberations are rather addressed to the Czech political elite and political situation in the country; especially in relation to the inability of the Czech politicians to conclude the Lisbon Treaty ratification process. The hostile tone of the (especially Austrian and French) press and some of the Brussels media has lowered the expectations significantly; as some Czech civil servants a bit bitterly put it, it is not at all a bad starting position because from now on the Czech Republic can only be a “nice surprise”.

The timing and circumstances are not favourable for the performance of the Czech Presidency for other reasons, too: European Parliament (EP) elections are taking place in June 2009, influencing the legislative effectiveness of the body; due to the campaign the EP is going to be ineffective for almost half of the Czech Presidency and thus limiting the room for legislative activity on certain dossiers. The EP elections will as well contribute to a heated political atmosphere in the Czech Republic. Also the European Commission’s term in office will be nearing its end during the Czech Presidency; given the state of the Lisbon Treaty ratification and the decision on the situation in Ireland after the negative referendum (new referendum in autumn 2009), Barroso Commission mandate will be prolonged. However, the negotiations on the new Commission President will be under way during the Czech Presidency with the rest of the Commissioners gradually splitting into two groups - those aspiring for re-nomination (with a limited will to promote any reform steps during the Czech Presidency) and those leaving the Commission for good (some of them striving to return to their domestic political life).

Political Situation

The domestic political situation is a complicating element of the Czech Presidency for several reasons: firstly, the unfinished ratification of the Lisbon Treaty; secondly, the position of the senior ruling coalition party centre-right Civic democrats (ODS) (in power with The Green Party and Chris

** The analysis represents strictly personal views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.*

tian democrats, KDU-ČSL) after the landslide victory of the opposition social democrats (ČSSD) in the regional and Senate (1/3) elections; the party has been experiencing an internal crisis (as well as the Greens and Christian democrats to some extent) since then, solved partly during the ODS convention (beginning of December 2008) with certain tensions still present in the party¹. The promised reconstruction of the government is under way; however significant changes are not envisaged. The last elections results are also impacting the efforts to conclude the political ceasefire with ČSSD for the upcoming six months, with the opposition social democrats pushing for preliminary general elections to be held in autumn 2009. Thirdly, the President Václav Klaus who is considered a controversial figure all over Europe, complicating especially the government's foreign policy line, and whose powers are largely symbolic in the Czech constitutional system, a fact not always fully reflected by the international press.

The Czech Republic is among the last four countries in the EU where the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon has not been concluded.² The Czech Republic opted for the parliamentary ratification; a 3/5 constitutional majority needs to be achieved in both parliamentary chambers. After their consent, the ratification needs to be concluded by the President's signature. Out of the five political parties represented in the parliament, the junior coalition members – KDU-ČSL and the Greens, are in favour of ratification, and so is the ČSSD; senior ruling ODS is split on the issue, only the Communist party is fully against the ratification.

The government elected in June 2006 with the senior ruling ODS was responsible for negotiations of the Lisbon Treaty text and for signing the document. PM Mirek Topolánek involved ODS Eurosceptic wing into the process by nominating its representative, MEP Jan Zahradil, a sherpa.³ By this move, the PM prevented the ODS Eurosceptics from harsh criticism on the outcome, however, he could not prevent the President Václav Klaus from taking openly critical approach. The intensity of his critique varied from focusing on certain aspects of the institutional reform (weaker Czech position in the QMV in the Council) to general arguments against the Treaty as such (sovereignty pooling, social legitimacy, etc.). Also the part of the ODS Senators (considered to be part of anti-PM stream in the party and given their status (majority election system) also out of PM's direct influence) criticised the Treaty and due to their opposition, the Senate of the Czech Republic referred the question of the ratification and compliance of the Lisbon Treaty with the Czech Constitution to the Constitutional Court on 24 April 2008. The Senate's concerns numbered to six, the three most important were the interrelationship between the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights with the Czech Charter of Fundamental Rights and Basic Freedoms, the transfer of competences under the new Treaty and the passerelle clause, and the principle of sovereignty. Until the Court's ruling the ratification process was suspended in the Senate as well as in the Chamber of Deputies. The Court ruled unanimously in favour of the compliance of the Treaty with the Czech Constitution in given six points on November 26, 2008. President Václav Klaus, a party to the case, expressed his dissatisfaction with the outcome.

¹ As a result of the crisis, the President Václav Klaus resigned on his role of the honorary chairman of ODS; a new right-wing Eurosceptic party is emerging, with the more or less open President's support.

² Ireland, Poland (waiting for President's signature), Germany (waiting for Constitutional Court ruling and President's signature).

³ During the negotiations on the Treaty, the government's own initiative was the so called "either-way flexibility or bidirectional competences transfer" (the transfer of a competence back to the member states from the community level on the bases of unanimity in the European Council) principle the Czech Republic wanted to have explicitly mentioned in the Treaty and succeeded in a very limited form with Declaration no. 18 on competences delimitation, which states that a legislative act of the Communities can be repealed on the basis of the Art. 241 and that the IGC can be convened in order to revise the Treaties and restrict the Community competences. Other concern was over Charter of Fundamental Rights; the Czech Republic succeeded in incorporating a "Declaration of the Czech Republic on the Charter of Fundamental Rights" into the body of the Treaty; the declaration refers to the Declaration 18 and principle of subsidiarity. Other priorities concerned especially the red card for the national parliaments (final compromise was accepted) and QMV application on the new areas, where the Czech Republic was against applying the procedure especially on taxation (however, these issues were blocked by other member states like UK, etc., too, and the Czech Republic was not the only member state expressing a concern).

An attempt to continue with the ratification in the Parliament right after the Constitutional Court ruling was scrapped. Given the complicated situation in the ODS and the coalition parties after the regional and Senate elections, the PM was most likely not sure on having 3/5 majority in both chambers (especially in the Senate). Since he could not repeat the vote if unfavourable, the second reading and vote on the Treaty will take place in both chambers at the beginning of February 2009. The President already declared he would not sign the Treaty (and thus finish the ratification) until the second vote in Ireland is taken in favour of the Treaty. As the Czech Constitution does not envisage any period for a President to conclude the ratification when the parliamentary vote is taken, Václav Klaus can effectively obstruct the conclusion of the ratification process in the Czech Republic for given time; there is no constitutional measure for the government to make him otherwise. The fact the Lisbon Treaty is not going to be ratified before the Czech Presidency starts is seen by many as a factor diminishing its credibility and legitimacy to negotiate and broke the deals in the EU; the Czech officials consider it to be rather utilitarian attitude and a virtual problem (as one of them put it, if it was not a Lisbon Treaty it would be something else).

A stability of the government and political room for manoeuvre at the EU level limited by rocking the boat of the domestic politics is another possible complicating factor, curtailing the abilities of the Czech political elites to act. After consolidating the situation in the ODS, achieving confirmation as a party leader for next two years, PM Topolánek strives to strike a deal with the opposition ČSSD on the political ceasefire during the Presidency; however, the efforts have not been successful so far since the PM refuses to agree to hold preliminary general elections in autumn 2009 as a binding conditions of such a deal. The cosmetic reconstruction of the government should be announced in the upcoming days (3 ministers will most likely leave their offices), probably with little impact on the Czech Presidency performance.

The government wants and needs President Václav Klaus to play a representative role during the Czech Presidency only; the scope of his involvement has not been clarified, yet. It seems he will be chairing some of the EU summits to be held under the Czech Presidency, most likely the summit EU-Canada or host a dinner for the foreign ministers of the EU member states and Rio Group countries. He should meet members of the European Commission in the Prague Castle on January 7 and present a speech in the European Parliament in February. His impact on policy-formulation and EU agenda is minimal; however, his political statements cannot be fully prevented by the government, as he serves the second term in the office without a possibility to get re-elected again.

Presidency Priorities and the envisaged content of the Presidency

The Czech Presidency was to be very dense in terms of number of priorities and questions to be dealt with. The extremely high activity of the French Presidency brought about a political solution of many of the complicated issues. There are certain speculations on the reasons of the French Presidency's enormous effort to lead the negotiations on some issues to the end (and in some cases even for pre-empting the Czech agenda despite the fact the preliminary agreement was reached within the 18-month working programme in the Trio), one of them being a lack of trust in Czech Presidency's capacity to handle the controversial topics as a broker. More probably, the French efforts were motivated by huge ambitions of the big country and by those of its leader, the French President Nicolas Sarkozy who wants to be remembered as someone who helped Europe to move forward, both by the European public and, more importantly, by the French people.

Whatever the reasons, the French Presidency handed over to the Czechs a few complicated issues. The political deal on the energy-climate package has been achieved at the last European Council (however, the Czech Republic is going to be responsible for the preparation of the EU position for the Copenhagen Conference (post-Kyoto regime) in close coordination with Sweden), so was the deal on the Lisbon Treaty and the "Irish impasse" or the composition of the

Commission as of November 2009. The review of the EU budget, originally scheduled for the Czech Presidency, has been put on hold due to postponement of publication of the White Paper by the Commission; the White Paper will be delivered during the Czech Presidency only, so the Czech representatives' role will be to launch the debates and hand over the issue to Sweden. The same goes for several other policy areas, too – for example, the finalization of the post-Hague plan 2010-2014 for the area of Freedom, Security and Justice (new “Prague Programme” was supposed to be adopted at European Council in June 2009) was shifted to the Swedish Presidency (to be agreed with the new European Commission and Parliament in autumn 2009), allegedly also as a Commission's pay back for the Czech Republic's unilateral negotiations over the visa waiver with the US.

As stated above, the legislative work and programme of the Czech Presidency will be shortened by the European elections in June 2009; the European Parliament will cease to work fully during April-May 2009. Although the number of issues to be dealt with by the Czech Presidency has been significantly decreased, there is still some important inherited agenda to be carried on and several Presidency priorities to be followed (the number of the Presidency priorities decreased over time; the Czech Republic will rather focus on a limited list of items, which is seen as a viable and reasonable strategy):

- 1) **Energy security:** The Czech Republic will have to discuss the Strategic Energy Review, which is currently prepared by the Commission, and launch discussion on the new Energy Action Plan, on the basis of the Strategic Review. The discussion will be focusing mainly on the external dimension of the energy security (Presidency priority), oil contingency stocks and the Green Paper on the Trans-European Energy Networks, which are, together with the Agency for Co-operation of Energy Regulators, also of strong Czech interests. The Czech Republic is planning to hold an informal Energy Council, gathering EU ministers and representatives of the supply countries.
- 2) **Commission president:** June European Council will be negotiating the post of the new Commission president, with regard to the result of the European elections. The pre-negotiations in the Council will take place in the course of the Czech Presidency; the Czech Republic has no strong stakes in the nomination (no candidate to be presented) and is thus quite well positioned for brokering the deal.
- 3) **Free movement of workers:** An issue of symbolic importance due to the transitional period still applied by some of the “old” member states (Germany, Austria, Belgium) on the “new” ones. The Czech Republic would like to profit from its Presidency in order to reverse the transitional periods but the goal seems unlikely to be achieved. Besides that, the Czech Republic will be pushing a liberal economic agenda more generally under its Presidency priorities chapter “Competitive Europe” (free movement of services, Lisbon Strategy with focus on research and development, liberal trade policy) respecting the motto of the Presidency: “Europe without barriers”.
- 4) **Working Time Directive:** An important piece of legislation which was not dealt with successfully during the French Presidency, the Czechs are expected to take over and chair and facilitate (within the co-decision procedure) the final phase of the negotiations.
- 5) **Eastern partnership:** new political initiative for upgrading relations with Eastern neighbours of the Union; the Czech Republic would like to lift it on the level of the EU policy. However, it is not clear enough what specific form this partnership should take; whether a similar one to the Union for the Mediterranean, or whether or not it will stay within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. European Commission should table a communication on the new initiative and how to accommodate it with other initiatives and policies followed in relations with EU neighbours (Union for the Mediterranean, Black Sea Strategy) in March 2009. The Czech Presidency will convene

a special summit with the heads of states and governments of the countries covered by the initiative, including Belarus.

- 6) **External summits:** The Czech Republic will represent the EU at several crucial summits. There will be regular **EU-US summit** of high importance because of the new US administration. The current government is atlanticist and the transatlantic agenda (including the Transatlantic Economic Council) is high on the list of priorities. The government sees the transatlantic link as crucial for EU ability and power to act as a global player in the international scene and as the closest partnership and alliance of the EU, which is necessary to preserve in order to be able to face the global challenges not only in the field of hard security but also climate change, humanitarian aid or economic and financial crisis. And, if organized, ad hoc EU-Israel summit at the highest level (such a possibility has been recently decided by EU foreign ministers at the end of the French Presidency).

The Czech Republic will also focus on the Western Balkans, with a visa liberalisation with some countries as a priority, and relations with Russia, which are rather based on pragmatism and balanced policy (pro-Russia stances of the President are sometimes hampering the efforts of the Czech diplomacy to send stronger signals). The Czech Presidency plans to initiate a cross-EU expert ideas sharing on the relations with Russia, aiming at achieving identification of common bases of EU member states' policies towards Russia and consequently at a more coherent EU strategy on Russia, which would be less asymmetric. Another policy priority is a re-definition of the EU's democracy and human rights policy concept, with an accent on the democracy promotion, a policy initiative, which will be carried on by the Swedes.⁴

As to the ongoing financial and economic crisis, a need to engage in solving the related challenges is not clear at the moment. French President Nicolas Sarkozy promised the Czech Republic will act as an observer in the Eurogroup; the question who will chair the group is not clear but at least the presence of the Presidency country represents a good precedent for the future because Eurogroup has been dealing with more general economic issues, not only single currency-related ones; it gathers before ECOFIN and a wide range of economic agenda is usually pre-negotiated there.

Presidency Management

Management is one of the important functions and tasks of the Presidency in general. The ability of the presiding country to carry out administrative function is often reflected in the assessment of the Presidency performance. To accomplish this task successfully and smoothly poses a great demand on the government and the civil service. The government has to ensure enough financial and human resources for the Presidency, its good co-ordination, communication, and security. The EU sets the general rules what the Presidency should do. However, it does not specify how the Presidency should achieve the set tasks and objectives. Presiding countries thus differ in the extent to which they involve individual actors dealing with European issues into the organisation and management of the Presidency. In this respect it is possible to distinguish two different approaches. The first one focuses on the division of powers within the member state itself and can be further divided into three models – centralised, decentralised and a combination of the two.⁵ The other approach concentrates on the role of the central institutions and

⁴ *Hlavní priority českého předsednictví EU 2009 [The Main Priorities of the Czech 2009 EU Presidency], Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, July 2008.*

⁵ *Within the centralised model, the centre - usually the Office of the Government or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – is entrusted with the powers to co-ordinate and manage the EU Presidency; the other actors have to follow their decisions in all aspects of the Presidency administration. In the decentralised model, ministries and Permanent Representation to the EU possess great autonomy in the management of the Presidency which representatives of regions, other institutions and authorities of state administration are involved in as well. The model combining both centralised and decentralised model almost put other actors on the same footing as the centre. The central*

the Permanent Representation to the European Union in the management of the Presidency. If the main responsibility for the organisation and execution of the Presidency rests with the centre, we talk about Capital-based model. And on the contrary, if it is the Permanent Representation that plays a key role in the co-ordination mechanism, such a model is termed Brussels-based model.⁶

Initially, it was not quite clear which model the Czech Republic would choose. The preparations for the Czech EU Presidency started under the coalition government of the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) and Christian democrats (KDU-ČSL) in 2005. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs became the main co-ordination body, but the role of the Permanent Representation was not explicitly defined. The situation did not improve much after the 2006 general elections that took the ODS to power. In November 2006, the minority government approved the establishment of a new post – government secretary for the co-ordination of the Czech Presidency. Zdeněk Hrubý should have taken charge of this post in January 2007 and concurrently held the function of minister without portfolio in the government; the Czech EU Presidency should have been closely connected to the Office of the Government. The co-ordination mechanism changed significantly at the beginning of 2007 when the new coalition government of ODS, KDU-ČSL and the Greens was established, including the new post of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs. Alexandr Vondra who filled this post has been put in charge of the EU matters in general and specifically of the preparation and management of the Presidency. The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic thus took the responsibility for the Czech Presidency from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and became the central co-ordination unit. The position of the government secretary for the co-ordination of the Czech Presidency was abolished. During the 2007 the process of transferring most powers within coordination of the EU agenda from MFA to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs proceeded; including changes at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU. Within the preparations for the EU Presidency, the government decided to change the ambassador of the Permanent Representation and appointed Milena Vicenová to this post in September 2007. She has been holding this post since January 2008.⁷

co-ordination unit co-ordinates preparations and execution of the Presidency while individual ministries bear responsibility for organisation of meetings within their scope and Permanent Representation also plays significant role in the co-ordination mechanism. It could carry out functions such as taking the chair of the Council of the EU meetings. Also regions are to a certain extent integrated in the Presidency.

⁶ See Tomalová, Eliška, “Koordinační mechanismus předsednictví ČR v Radě EU“ [Co-ordination Mechanism of the Czech EU Presidency], in: Karlas, Jan et al., *Jak předsedat Evropské unii? Návrh priorit předsednictví ČR v Radě EU v roce 2009*. Institute of International Relations, Prague: 2008, pp. 121–122.

⁷ *Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 25. října 2006 č. 1238 o vnitrostátním koordinačním mechanismu pro přípravu a výkon předsednictví České republiky v Radě Evropské unie [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 1238 on the co-ordination mechanism for the preparations and execution of the Czech EU Presidency], 25 October 2006; Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 25. října 2006 č. 1239 o změně Statutu Výboru pro Evropskou unii [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 1239 on the change of the Statute of the Committee for the European Union], 25 October 2006; Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 3. ledna 2007 č. 273 ke způsobu personálního a finančního zajištění činnosti vládního tajemníka pro přípravu předsednictví České republiky v Radě Evropské unie a výkonného sekretariátu pro přípravu a výkon předsednictví České republiky v Radě Evropské unie včetně vymezení jejich kompetencí, [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 273 on the activities of the Government Secretary for the Co-ordination of the Czech Presidency and Executive Secretariat], 3 January 2007; Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 9. ledna 2007 č. 39 o jmenování místopředsedy vlády pro evropské záležitosti [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 39 on the Appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister on European Affairs], 9 January 2007; Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 17. ledna 2007 č. 58 o zajištění činnosti útvaru místopředsedy vlády pro evropské záležitosti a o změně usnesení vlády z 25. října 2006 č. 1238, o vnitrostátním koordinačním mechanismu pro přípravu a výkon předsednictví České republiky v Radě Evropské unie, usnesení vlády z 25. října 2006 č. 1239, o změně Statutu Výboru pro Evropskou unii a usnesení vlády z 3. ledna 2007 č. 27, ke způsobu personálního a finančního zajištění činnosti vládního tajemníka pro přípravu předsednictví České republiky v Radě Evropské unie a výkonného sekretariátu pro přípravu a výkon předsednictví České republiky v Radě Evropské unie včetně vymezení jejich kompetencí, [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 58 on the activities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the European Affairs], 17 January 2007; Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 12. září 2007 č. 1061 k návrhu na změnu ve funkci vedoucího zastupitelského úřadu v hodnosti mimořádného a zplnomocněného velvyslance České republiky [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution*

In relation to these changes, the government decided to adopt the management model based on the combination of centralised and decentralised models ensuring central management of the Presidency and at the same time certain degree of autonomy for ministries in terms of organisation and preparations for the Presidency, involving also regions and the Permanent Representation with the main responsibility on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs. The decision to adopt such a model for the Presidency management was made by the government. The model chosen seeks to combine the advantages of both, centralised and decentralised models. As for the Presidency performance, some tensions between the Office of the Government and the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs might occur. To a large extent it will depend on personal discipline and willingness to co-operate of people involved at both institutions.

In addition to ensuring organisational and logistical part of the Presidency, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs is responsible for its publicity and communication with media and the Council of the EU. There are two sections and one department at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs – Czech EU Presidency Section managed by Jana Hendrichová, European Affairs Section managed by Marek Mora and European Affairs Information Department; the Czech EU Presidency Section⁸ deals with co-ordination of the Presidency, the European Affairs Section has been engaged in setting the agenda and formulation of Presidency priorities.

Special attention is given to the **communication strategy** because communication prior to and during the Czech Presidency is considered a very important aspect of the Presidency that can contribute to the publicity of the country. Concept for Communication and Presentation of the Czech EU Presidency was prepared by the Communication Department of the Czech EU Presidency Section and approved by the Committee for the EU (see below) in July 2007. The aim is to present preparation for the Presidency and then the EU Presidency itself in an objective and comprehensible way not only in the Czech Republic, but also at the European level. The document defines principles, objectives, target groups and instruments of the communication such as motto of the Czech EU Presidency, logo, website www.eu2009.cz, promotional materials, presents, and cultural events in the Czech Republic and abroad. For this purpose the Communication Round Table was set up.⁹

The changes in the management of the Czech EU Presidency also influenced the role and structure of **the Committee for the European Union**. This working body of the Government of the Czech Republic became the main unit for formulating political and strategic priorities of the Czech EU Presidency. It was divided into two levels. The Committee for the European Union at the governmental level consists of ministers involved into the Czech EU Presidency and is chaired by the Prime Minister or by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs as a Vice chairman of this Committee. There are also associate members such as the Chancellor of the Office of the President or the Governor of the Czech National Bank whose role is only advisory. The head of the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic in Brussels can participate in the meetings as well (she usually does so via videoconference). The task of the Committee is to

No. 1061 to the motion to change the head of the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU], 12 September 2007.

⁸ The Czech EU Presidency Section is further divided into 3 departments – Logistics and Organisation Department, Budget and Public Procurement Department and Communication Department. This section co-ordinates activities ranging from the organisation of the Council of the EU meetings in the Czech Republic, arranging suppliers to cover services to the publicity of the Presidency and media coverage. To fulfil the tasks related to the organisation of the EU institution's meetings and technical assistance the Central Organizational Group was set up. The Group is co-ordinated by the Logistics and Organisation Department and comprises representatives of ministries, regions, and contracted suppliers of services such as conference and interpreting services or accommodation.

⁹ *Shrnutí koncepce komunikace a prezentace předsednictví ČR v Radě EU [Concept for Communication and Presentation of the Czech EU Presidency]*, Czech EU Presidency Section, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, July 2007, available at: http://www.vlada.cz/assets/cs/eu/dokumenty/shrnuti_koncepce_komunikace_a_prezentace_predsednictvi.pdf.

adopt basic strategic materials and formulate political priorities of the Presidency. It also approves instructions and mandates for the Prime Minister and his delegation to the European Council. The Committee for the European Union at working level comprises the deputies of ministers and the head of the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic in Brussels. Representatives of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate are examples of associated members who can take part in the meetings too. The committee is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs or by one of his State Secretaries. The committee deals with co-ordination and agenda setting for individual compositions of the Council of the European Union, and also adopts the instructions for COREPER.¹⁰

The **Office of the Government of the Czech Republic** does not co-ordinate organisational arrangements for the Czech Presidency at individual ministries. It is entirely up to them to address this issue. However, they have to ensure that general requirements for the Presidency have been fulfilled within their competences. Ministries are responsible for the agenda setting at the EU Council as well as at expert meetings, for the preparation of the accompanying programme for delegations, monitoring of delegations, filling the content of the Presidency website and for training their employees in issues concerning the EU and the Presidency. Each ministry has its ministerial co-ordination group that in relation to the Presidency is responsible for its agenda setting.

Many powers concerning the Czech EU Presidency were transferred from the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** to the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. However, MFA plays an important role in the preparation for the Czech EU Presidency, especially in the area of external relations. It will represent the European Union in the countries outside the EU and in the international organisations such as UN or OSCE. The main task of the Czech embassies in countries outside the EU will be the organisation of cultural and social events on the occasion of the beginning and the end of the Czech EU Presidency. They also have to monitor the media and political attitudes to the Czech EU Presidency during the preparation phase and its course. The main co-ordination body of the activities related to the Presidency at the MFA is the Secretariat for Czech Presidency that was established in April 2007. The Secretariat co-ordinates the activities of other departments and co-operates with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs. There is also Ministerial Co-ordination Group responsible for the preparation for the Czech EU Presidency and chaired by the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. The group is divided into 5 subgroups focusing on various aspects of the Presidency – content, multilateral, personal, logistic, communication and presentation. In the course of the upcoming six month, the Presidency team, advisory body to the Minister of Foreign Affairs led by the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, will issue operative recommendations in areas coming under the competence of the MFA, in particular in external relations, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs or possibly to the Prime Minister or to the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs.

The Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU was also affected by the changes in the EU affairs management. The Representation remained institutionally subordinated to the MFA, but it is managed by both, MFA and the Office of the Deputy Minister for the European Affairs. It is an important communication channel between the EU institutions and the Czech Republic. The Representation provides support for individual ministries in their cooperation with EU institutions, especially with the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. As for the Presidency specifically, the Permanent Representation occupies irreplaceable position. It will closely co-operate with the

¹⁰ *Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 25. října 2006 č. 1239 o změně Statutu Výboru pro Evropskou unii [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 1239 on the change of the Statute of the Committee for the European Union], 25 October 2006; Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 25. února 2008 č. 148 o Statutu Výboru pro Evropskou unii [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 148 on the Statute of the Committee for the EU 25 February 2008.*

General Secretariat of the Council, provide organisational background for meetings of the Council of the EU and manage working groups in Brussels.¹¹

The involvement of the **President of the Czech Republic** into the co-ordination mechanism of the Presidency is not substantial. The President is represented through the Chancellor of the Office of the President at the Committee for the European Union at both the governmental and working level, however only as an associated member. The Chancellor can participate in negotiations on programme priorities and political agenda and on organisational preparations for the Presidency and thus inform the President on the current development.¹²

Another actor incorporated in the preparations and execution of the Presidency is the **Parliament of the Czech Republic**. Each chamber of the Parliament – the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate – has its committee for EU affairs that co-operate with each other only within co-ordination meetings. No common body in relation to the Czech Presidency was established. Initially the co-operation at the political level was not very good, but it has been improving as the preparations for the Presidency intensified. However, the lack of co-operation does not apply to the administrative level – Senate EU department has been closely co-operating with the Parliamentary Institute in the Chamber of Deputies on issues related to the Czech Presidency. As for the co-operation with the government, representatives of both parliamentary chambers take part in the meetings of the Committee for the European Union at the working level as associated members. The government has been also regularly informing the EU committees on the progress of the preparations for the Presidency and also consulted them on Presidency priorities and on setting the calendar of activities. In relation to the Presidency, the Parliament does not possess any special powers. It can only use the instrument of parliamentary reservation. If the plenary or committee sessions of chambers decide to debate any specific issue, the government must not take final decision on this issue until the parliamentary debate is finished. During the Presidency the Parliament is responsible for the organisation of the Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of the Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), joint meetings of parliamentary committees in Prague, Joint Parliamentary Meeting in Brussels and other accompanying events.¹³

Also **regions** are involved in the preparations for the Czech Presidency. Association of the Regions as a representative body of the Czech regions participates in the meetings of the Central Co-ordination Group. The Czech Republic will host 11 informal meetings of the Council of the EU of which two thirds will be held outside Prague. These meetings will take place in Prague, Brno, Hluboká nad Vltavou, Litoměřice, Luhačovice, Mariánské Lázně and Olomouc. The pre-conditions for hosting such events were good transport accessibility, accommodation and conference capacity. Location of these meetings was approved not only by the Committee of the EU at the government level, but also by the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. Furthermore, about 160 meetings in other Czech towns will be organised at lower political and expert level. The role of the regions in the co-ordination mechanism of the Presidency is limited to the organisation of accompanying events that are primarily aimed at the presentation of the regions and have to be paid from their own budgets. The regions should also play an important

¹¹ *Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí: Vyhodnocení institucionálního zajištění členství ČR v EU v období od 1. května 2007 do 31. prosince 2007 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Evaluation of the Institutional Arrangements of the Czech Republic in the EU, May–December 2007], available at:*

<http://www.mzv.eu/wwwo/MZV/default.asp?id=26399&ido=7443&idj=1&amb=1>; *Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí: Předsednictví ČR v Radě EU [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Czech EU Presidency], available at:*

<http://www.mzv.eu/wwwo/mzv/default.asp?ido=21456&idj=1&amb=1&ikony=&trid=1&prsl=&pocc1=>

¹² See Tomalová, Eliška, "Koordinační mechanismus předsednictví ČR v Radě EU" [Co-ordination Mechanism of the Czech EU Presidency] in: Karlas, Jan et al., *Jak předsedat Evropské unii? Návrh priorit předsednictví ČR v Radě EU v roce 2009*. Institute of International Relations, Prague: 2008, pp. 123.

¹³ *Czech EU Presidency - Official website of the Parliament of the Czech Republic -* <http://www.parliament.cz/czpres2009/>; interviews with representatives of the Senate and Parliamentary Institute, December 2008.

part in communicating the Czech EU Presidency to the Czech citizens through their regional information centres. All other things concerning the meetings are provided by the centre.¹⁴

The fulfilment of the Presidency tasks and objectives requires sufficient and highly qualified human resources. The government thus decided to reinforce temporarily the number of people in the public administration by 365 new employees; the staff of the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic in Brussels has increased by 110 people to 220.¹⁵ Civil servants involved in the preparation and execution of the Presidency have to have certain level of knowledge of English and French, and EU issues, in particular its decision-making process and legislative procedures. Initially (in January 2006), the government proposed that all civil servants should have a good knowledge of French to be able to communicate without problems and understand written texts. This initiative of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Cyril Svoboda, caused negative reactions at some ministries. The current coalition government decided to leave the level of knowledge of the French language up to the individual ministries. Some civil servants, especially those who will chair the working groups and their alternates are also required to have excellent negotiation skills and thus be able to negotiate the compromise already at this level of decision-making process.¹⁶

The Institute of State Administration at the Ministry of Interior is responsible for education and training of the civil servants in all aspects of the EU Presidency within the National educational programme valid since January 2006. The Institute closely co-operates with foreign organisations such as the Institute of Public Administration in Ireland or the Centre for European Negotiations and Decision-making in Brussels. For example chairmen of working groups are trained in switching – to be able fluently switch negotiations from English into the French and vice versa.¹⁷

As for the financial resources for the management of the Czech Presidency, the government allocated CZK 1.9 billion for the years 2007–2009 (CZK 200 million for 2007, CZK 700 million for 2008 and CZK 1 billion for 2009). These resources are primarily intended for the co-ordination of the Presidency, security, training of civil servants, or reinforcement of state administration. Other resources amounted to CZK 1.4 billion are set aside for the individual ministries. Czech EU Presidency will be also financially supported by the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. Regions activities concerning the cultural or other accompanying events will be financed from their own resources. The government also aims to involve private sector into the Presidency through the sponsorship. Ministry of Finance is responsible for the distribution of money in relation to the Presidency.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Memorandum o spolupráci mezi Ministerstvem zahraničních věcí ČR a Asociací krajů ČR v evropských záležitostech [Memorandum on Co-operation between Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Association of the Regions of the Czech Republic in European Affairs], May 2007, available at: <http://www.mzv.eu/servis/soubor.asp?id=25727>; Czech EU Presidency 2009. Questions and Answers, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Prague: 2008, p. 10.*

¹⁵ *In the Czech Republic, the biggest increase is recorded at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture. Because the reinforcement of the civil service is only temporary, these new posts and positions should be cancelled by the end of 2009.*

¹⁶ *The employees participating in the Presidency also take part in the study trips and workshops related to the Presidency in the EU Member States that have terminated their Presidency recently such as Austria, Germany, or Slovenia or in France which has been presiding the EU. Some of them also monitor the preparation for the Presidency in Sweden.*

¹⁷ *Czech EU Presidency 2009. Questions and Answers, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, Prague: 2008, p. 9, interview with representative of the Ministry of Industry and Trade, November 2008.*

¹⁸ *Czech EU Presidency 2009. Questions and Answers, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, p. 5.*

Campaign

The government put a great emphasis on the media, Presidency publicity and on bringing this issue closer to the Czech public. The first part of the Presidency campaign was launched in September 2008 involving famous Czech people from various fields and disciplines – top-model Tereza Maxová, architect Eva Jiříčková, scientist and discoverer of medicaments Antonín Holý, conductor Libor Pešek, prima ballerina Daria Klimešová, ice-hockey player Jaromír Jágr and goalkeeper Petr Čech. The catchword of the campaign is “Let’s sweeten Europe” with a sugar lump. This part was accompanied by the road show across the Czech Republic explaining the EU Presidency to the public. The aim of this part of the campaign was to attract the attention of the Czech public to the Presidency. The other part of the campaign started in November when the logo of the Presidency was revealed. This part has focused more on the explanation of function and priorities of the Czech EU Presidency.

How has been the government successful so far in its campaign? According to the Centre of Empirical Surveys (Středisko empirických výzkumů, STEM), in April 2008 only 50 percent of Czechs knew that the Czech Republic would preside the EU. Only 1/5 of respondents had a basic idea how the Czech EU Presidency would proceed. Interestingly enough, 60% of respondents stated that one of the most important tasks of the government in the next year would be the successful management of the Presidency.¹⁹ In September 2008, the Public Opinion Research Centre (Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, CVVM) carried out a survey that revealed that 1% of respondents had enough and 15 percent rather enough information on what the Presidency is about. Similar results were achieved on the question whether people have information on the government preparation for the Presidency – only 1 percent of respondents stated that they decidedly had enough information and 11% indicated they had enough information.²⁰ One month later, in October 2008, the polls showed that more and more Czechs (71 percent) know that the Czech Republic will hold Presidency from January 2009. However, only 25 percent of respondents said they knew how the Czech Presidency would proceed, the same number of respondents indicated that the country was prepared well for the Presidency, and 15 percent of people responded they had enough information about the preparations of the Presidency.²¹

The opinion polls show that people are increasingly aware that the Czech Republic will preside the EU Council, however, they do not have enough information on how the Presidency is being prepared, how it will proceed and what they should expect from it.

¹⁹ STEM, *Trendy 4/2008* [Trends 4/2008], 22.4.2008, available at: <http://www.stem.cz/clanek/1506>.

²⁰ *Občané o předsednictví v Radě Evropské unie* [Citizens on the Czech Presidency in the Council of the EU], The Public Opinion Research Centre, Press Release, available at: http://www.cvvm.cas.cz/upl/zpravy/100827s_eu81013.pdf.

²¹ STEM, *Trendy 10/2008* [Trends 10/2008], 31.10.2008, available at: <http://www.stem.cz/clanek/1631>.

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http://www.vlada.cz/assets/cs/eu/dokumenty/shrnuti_koncepce_komunikace_a_prezentace_pre dsednictvi.pdf.

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Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 25. října 2006 č. 1239 o změně Statutu Výboru pro Evropskou unii [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 1239 on the change of the Statute of the Committee for the European Union], 25 October 2006.

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Usnesení vlády ČR ze dne 9. ledna 2007 č. 39 o jmenování místopředsedy vlády pro evropské záležitosti [Government of the Czech Republic Resolution No. 39 on the Appointment of the Deputy Prime Minister on European Affairs], 9 January 2007.

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