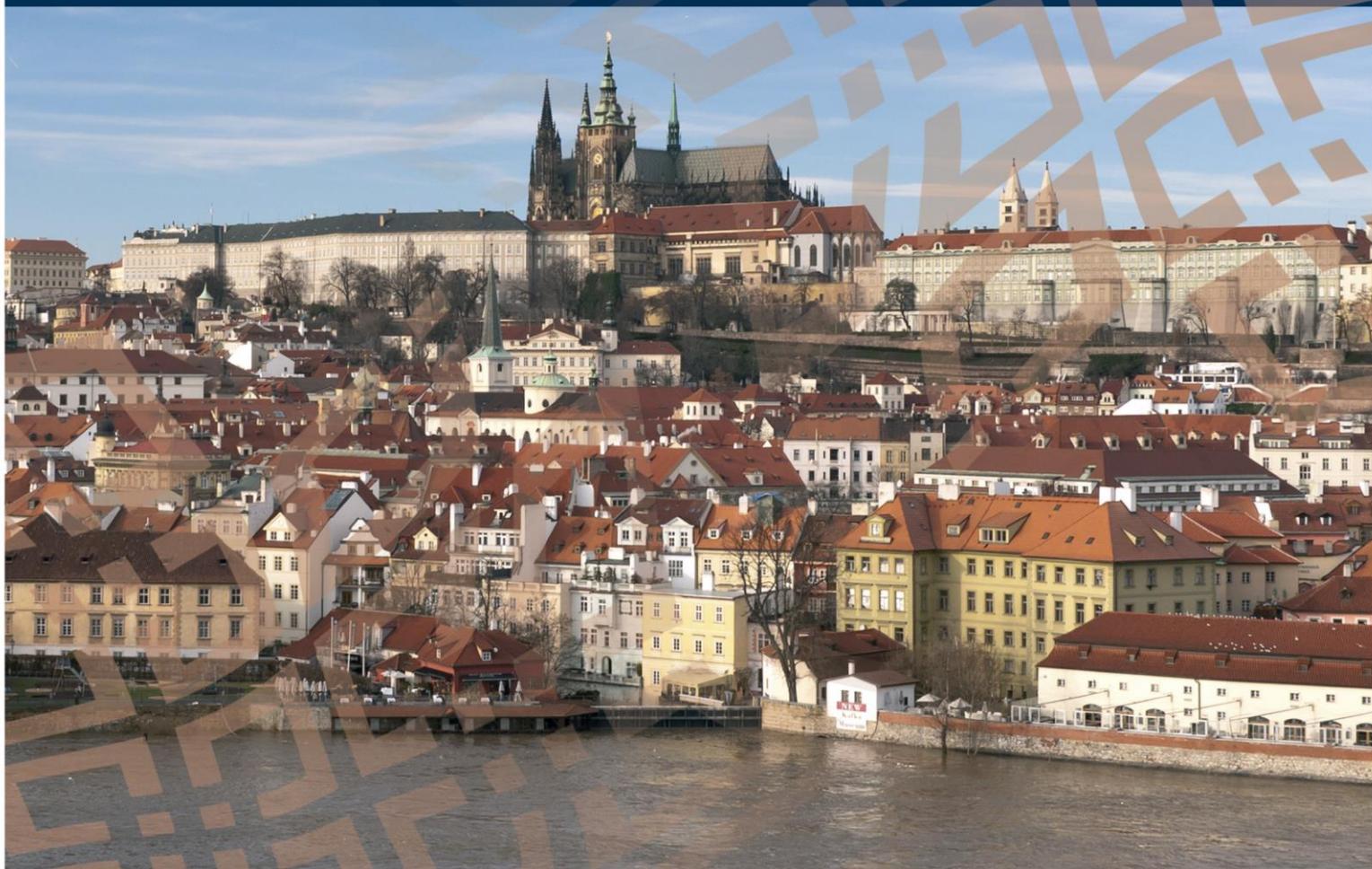




CENTRUM TRANSATLANTICKÝCH VZTAHŮ
Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations

PCTR Newsletter

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Message from the Director

Dear readers,

The first issue of the PCTR Newsletter in 2015 is here. As always it contains a bulletin and summary of the most important events in the field of transatlantic relations in the past month.

We are proud to welcome the New Year with several innovations. Hopefully, you will like them. First of all, we started PCTR blog on the CEVRO Institute website. This new feature enables you to find all articles and interviews made by the PCTR team members. Secondly, we have decided to add a direct link to audio/video records from each of our events - as you can see here.

Last but not least, we have published a bilingual policy paper "Czech- American Relations: A Roadmap for the Future" authored by both Czech and foreign experts. The document focuses on evaluation of the development of the Czech-American relations and its changes within the past 20 years. It is also analyzes current stagnation of the transatlantic ties. The paper includes eight specific recommendations for further development of these relations.

Of course, we are already preparing new public conferences and seminars for you. Up-to-date information will be available on our website and via Facebook.

Sincerely,

*Alexandr Vondra
director*

PCTR Bulletin

The Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations of the CEVRO Institute (PCTR) organized a press conference entitled: **How has the Czech foreign policy changed over the 25 years since Vaclav Havel's address to the US Congress?** The event took place on 22nd January, 2015.

The press conference was highly attended by both public and press.

The director of the PCTR, Dr. Alexandr Vondra opened the event. **A new [policy paper](#) issued by PCTR and Center and European Policy Analysis (CEPA) with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Czech Republic was the main topic of the conference.**



Dr. Vondra reminded the audience of the 25th anniversary of President Václav Havel's speech at the US Congress, but also of the events of the year 2014. He elaborated on the subject of transformation of the Czech-U.S. relations, remembered significant personalities who had passed away last year and spoke about the circumstances that had preceded the writing of the policy paper. The authors of the text are Czech and foreign personalities with personal connections to our homeland and with wide range of opinions. Dr. Vondra also mentioned the economic aspects of Czech - U.S. relations.



Regarding that, Dr. Vondra reminded the audience of the findings based on the research about transatlantic relations. He stressed out that although there were some rather skeptical opinions among 1000 respondents, general public is in favor of strong ties between the Czech Republic and the USA.

Alexandr Vondra pointed out that the atmosphere in the society had changed since Havel's memorable speech - that the idealism is much weaker now and therefore the idealists might not be excited about the conclusions of the presented PP. He listed eight points, which should help to ensure that the Czech Republic is not perceived as a secondary partner and ally (eg. Czech-Polish relations, energy security, very little involvement of the Czech Republic in the EU or missed opportunity regarding closure of the RFE/RSE). Participants of the conference were also promised a publication of the new text that is based on the conclusions of the PP.

Some of the Czech authors of the PP were present at the conference (Jiří Schneider, Tomas Pojar). Jiri Schneider mentioned that the period of romanticism and great personalities was over. According to him, the relationship of the Czech Republic and USA is very asymmetric and if we want to get attention, we have to do something extreme, either good or bad.

Last but not least, Mr. Tomas Pojar spoke about the need to focus to maintain long-term policies. Each government should do its best to follow the steps of the previous one, not to go in its own direction.

At the end, Dr. Vondra repeated some of the key ideas of the policy paper and opened the floor for questions. Our thanks go to the Civic Institute and IC NATO for media cooperation.



On Thursday DATE PCTR Director Alexandr Vondra participated in the public discussion about the 6th President Obama's State of the Union address. Jiri Schneider (PSSI), Katerina Safarikova (Lidove noviny) and Krystof Kozak (Department of America Studies, FSS, Charles University) were the other speakers. Some of the discussed topics follow:

- What are Barack Obama's comments about the past year in office?
- What suggestions did he make for the next year?
- What agenda would be White House pushing in the Congress?
- What would be the cooperation between 'democratic White House' and 'republican Congress'?

Events in Euro-Atlantic relations (January 2015)

The treaty forming Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) came into power on 1st January. It has established a single market for Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. It is expected that Armenia and Kyrgyzstan would join the project soon. According to Russian president Vladimir Putin, the EEU is open to any state on the east or west of Russia. Putin has said that Uzbekistan, Turkey, Israel, Vietnam or India seemed to be interested in cooperation.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63321390-rusko-spousti-konkurenci-eu-v-euroasijskem-spolku-mu-ale-chybi-ukrajina>

Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a decree that allows foreigners to serve in the Russian army on 6th January. The only conditions to become a member of the army are a clear criminal report and ability to communicate in Russian. Moscow primarily expects soldiers from Caucasus, Transnistria and Central Asia. Experts say the decree only legalized common practice. It is estimated that some 300 foreigners serve in the Russian army.

http://zpravy.idnes.cz/ruska-armada-cizinci-stredni-asie-kavkaz-separatiste-p0l-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150106_121600_zahranicni_vez

Two terroristic attacks that left 17 people dead have shocked France. On 7th January two brothers, Cherif and Said Kouachi, stormed into the offices of the French satirical weekly magazine Charlie Hebdo and killed 12 people. The magazine was famous for its controversial cartoons mocking all religions including Islam and its prophet Mohammed. Terrorist have fled the spot and two days later took hostages at a signage company near Paris. Both brothers were shot dead during the police rescue action. At the same time another attack took place at kosher supermarket at Porte de Vincennes. Amedy Coulibaly killed four people and held captive several others. Police commando rescued the hostages and shot him dead.

http://zpravy.idnes.cz/pariz-strelba-mrtvi-0qa-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150107_121609_zahranicni_bse, http://zpravy.idnes.cz/francie-charlie-hebdo-tiskarna-zasah-d77-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150109_172016_zahranicni_aha

The U.S. is planning to strengthen its military presence in Europe due to current Russian policies. Media informed about the plan on 7th January. American army would continue to rotate its forces on the eastern NATO border and is expected to triple number of its tanks and armored vehicles dislocated in Europe,

http://www.natoaktual.cz/armada-usa-posle-dalsi-tanky-do-evropy-dx6-/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150107_150713_na_zpravy_m00

The Czech government approved nomination of lieutenant general Josef Becvar to the position of the Chief of the General Staff of the Czech army. He is replacing General Peter Pavel, who is taking place of the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee this summer. New Chief of the General Staff will be appointed by president Milos Zeman on government's nomination.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/generalni-stab-povede-becvar-dgo-/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150107_154652_na_zpravy_m00

Jiri Schams, Czech war veteran and hero, who was seriously injured in a suicide bomber's attack while serving in Afghanistan in 2008, died on 7th January. In May 2014, Mr. Schams was diagnosed with cancer. On 15th January was held a funeral, which was attended not only by family members, colleagues and friends, but also by the highest representatives of the Army and the Ministry of Defense.

<http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/jiri-schams--valecny-veteran-a-hrdina--byl-pro-mnoho-lidi-inspiraci-106109/>, <http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/politika/zprava/pohreb-jiriho-schamse-doprovodil-prelet-gripenu-i-cestna-salva--1444182>

Facing tight budgets, the United States is ending operations at an air base in Great Britain and handing it and 14 other sites in Europe back to their home governments, Reuters informed on 8th January. Several facilities in Germany will be close. Some 500 U.S. troops will be withdrawn from Portugal and about 300 personnel will be shifted from Germany to Italy. Assistant defense secretary Derek Chollet said the changes would reduce support infrastructure, but would not affect the U.S. military's operational capacity in the region.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/08/us-usa-defense-europe-idUSKBN0KH18O20150108>

European Commission has proposed to provide Ukraine with financial help of 1.8 billion euro. The proposal revealed on 9th January has to be approved by the governments of EU members and by the European Parliament. If agreed, the loan would be the third program of EU aid to Ukraine since 2010.

<https://www.euroskop.cz/8956/25137/clanek/ek-slibila-ukrajine-pujcku-1-8-miliardy-eur/>

The Chief of General Staff of the Czech Army Petr Pavel made an official visit in France on 12th and 13th January. Czech General went to Paris upon invitation by his French counterpart Pierre De Villiers. The highest military representatives discussed cooperation opportunities of the armies. They have agreed to continue with common training for helicopter pilots in the high-mountains-environment of The Pyrenees. French and Czech would also continue with common training for CBRN specialists and they plan to strengthen their cooperation in the field of information and skills exchange, such as from the operations in Sub-Saharan Africa.

<http://www.acr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/spoluprace-mezi-cechy-a-francouzi-bude-pokracovat-106253/>

Unidentified foreign submarines have been several times spotted in Swedish and British waters. According to media information from 13th January, Britain spotted the submarine near the shore of Scotland and Sweden recorded two similar incidents in its waters. Therefore, Britain has asked its NATO allies for aerial control over British territorial waters. Sweden claimed it was going to strengthen cooperation with Finland and to improve its abilities to detect and capture such uninvited vessels.

http://zpravy.idnes.cz/cizi-ponorky-u-skotska-a-svedska-do4-/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150113_133005_zpr_nato_inc

Europol warned that Europe is at its highest risk ever for a terror attack on 16th January. It claimed it is almost impossible to eliminate all potential threats. A large number of Islamic extremists without any clear command and tactics were identified as very dangerous. Between three to five

thousands Europeans, who left to join Islamists in the Middle East, represent another serious threat in case of their return back to Europe, Europol has stated.

<https://www.euroskop.cz/8962/25198/clanek/europol-riziko-terorismu-je-obrovske/>

Russian army is re-building its presence at military base near the city of Alakurtii on the borders with Finland. Several hundreds of Russian Northern Fleet members were already present on 16th January according to the media. More soldiers, including special units trained for combat in arctic conditions, were expected soon. Re-establishment of the base fits into Russian strategy to confirm its ambitions in Arctic regions, and to multiply its chances to take part in lucrative oil and gas drilling in northern waters.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/rusko-buduje-arktickou-zakladnu-u-finska-fp6-
/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150119_131029_zpr_nato_inc](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/rusko-buduje-arktickou-zakladnu-u-finska-fp6-/zpr_nato.aspx?c=A150119_131029_zpr_nato_inc)

Separatists in the eastern Ukraine launched an offensive after they had repelled an unsuccessful attack of Ukrainian army. On 22nd January media informed that pro-Russian separatists took control over Doneck airport. Ukrainian army pulled out from the devastated airport complex after eight months of fighting. Since September 2014, Doneck airport had been a center of the fiercest fights. On 24th January separatists launched an attack on the coastal city of Mariupol in Doneck region. Due to the shelling of the city, 30 people, most of them civilians, died and about 100 more were injured. On 31st January Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak reported heavy battles between Ukrainian army and separatist near the strategic city of Debaltseve. The city is located on the crossroad between main separatist strongholds Doneck and Luhansk. Minister Poltorak claimed Debaltseve was been seized by the army.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/doneck-letiste-somali-sparta-vostok-kyborgove-bitva-ukrajina-p6e-
/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150122_191240_zahranicni_aha,](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/doneck-letiste-somali-sparta-vostok-kyborgove-bitva-ukrajina-p6e-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150122_191240_zahranicni_aha,) [http://zpravy.idnes.cz/raketovy-utok-
mariupol-ukrajina-d4d-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150124_103734_zahranicni_hro,](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/raketovy-utok-mariupol-ukrajina-d4d-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150124_103734_zahranicni_hro,)
<http://echo24.cz/a/w9rvr/ukrajinska-armada-hlasi-tezke-ztraty-a-zratu-strategickeho-mista>

NATO has reported a rise in number of Russian tanks and other heavy military equipment in eastern Ukraine. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg specified that the Alliance observed an increased number of Russian tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, and advanced air-defense systems U.S. Ambassador to Kiev Geoffrey Pyatt added that Russia had supplied separatists with hundred pieces of heavy military technique at the end of December. Media revealed this information on 21st January.

[http://www.natoaktual.cz/ruskych-tanku-na-ukrajine-podel-nato-pribylo-fnk-
/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150202_183151_na_zpravy_m00](http://www.natoaktual.cz/ruskych-tanku-na-ukrajine-podel-nato-pribylo-fnk-/na_zpravy.aspx?c=A150202_183151_na_zpravy_m00)

Representatives of the left-winged Syriza party - the winner of the Greek parliamentary election - announced a plan to form a governing coalition with smaller right-winged Independent Greeks party on 26th January. The leader of the Syriza party Alexis Tsipras became new Greek Prime Minister. Both coalition parties have repeatedly refused strict spending cuts prescribed to Greece by international lenders in exchange for extensive loans. The victory of Syriza affected euro exchange rate. European currency dropped to its 11-year minimum against the dollar.

[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/syriza-se-pokusi-zformovat-vladu-s-pravicovymi-nezavislymi-reky-1cc-
/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150126_105749_zahranicni_im](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/syriza-se-pokusi-zformovat-vladu-s-pravicovymi-nezavislymi-reky-1cc-/zahranicni.aspx?c=A150126_105749_zahranicni_im)

On 28th January, the Czech Government approved changes in organization of police and fire-brigade proposed by the Ministry of Interior. The draft includes proposal to increase the number of policemen by 142 and firefighters by 62. Interior Minister Milan Chovanec explained, the analysis of uncontrolled explosions at the ammunition warehouse in Vrbetice in December 2014 had proven lack of personnel capacities for preventing such incidents. As minister said, the main reason for increasing the number of police and firefighters was to enable more efficient overlook over weapons and ammunition storages, but also better readiness for emergency situations. Chovanec also informed that his aim was to gradually increase policemen numbers by 4,000.

<http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/vlada-schvalila-navyseni-poctu-policistu-a-hasicu-pro-letosni-rok.aspx>