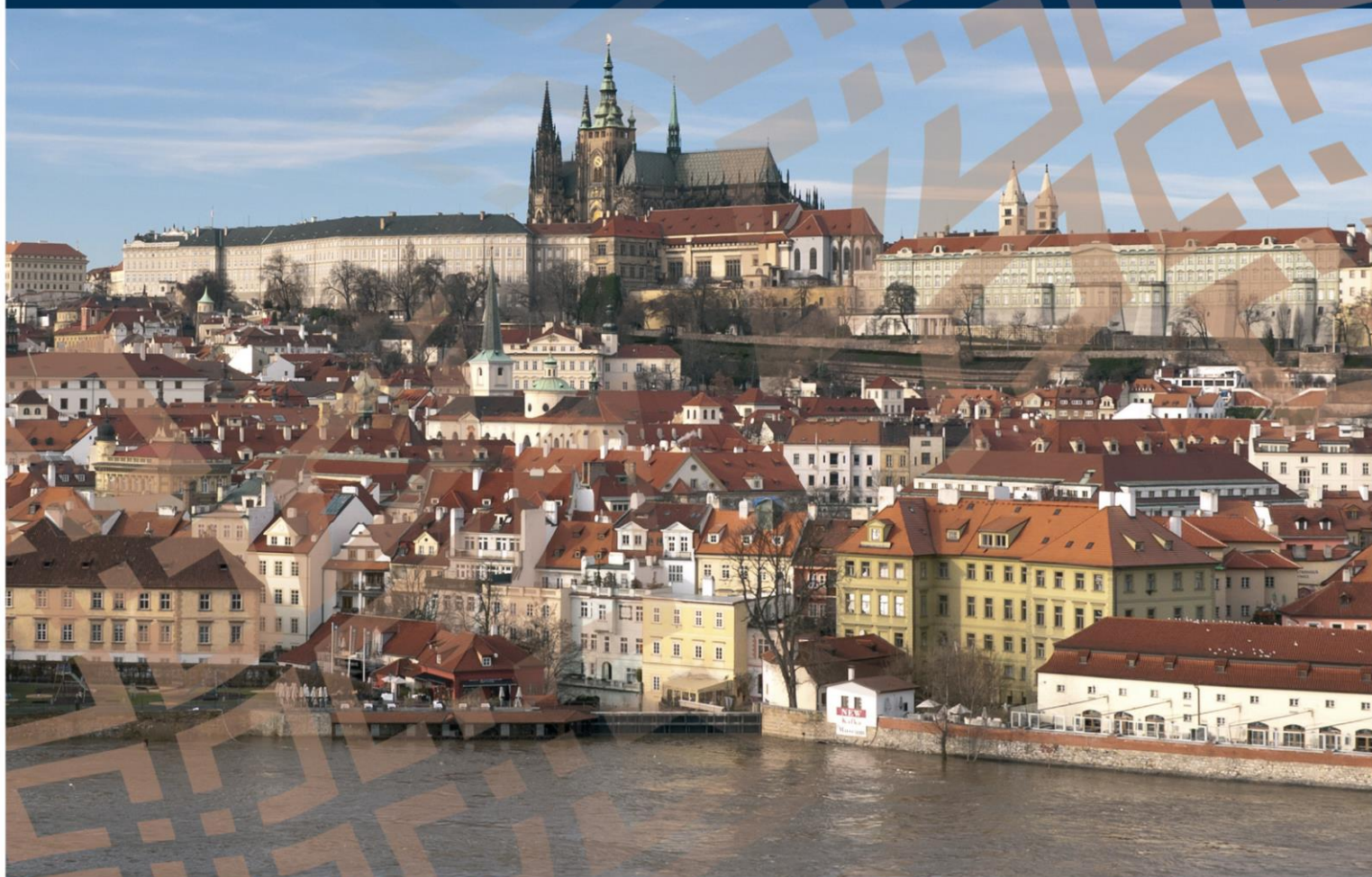




CENTRUM TRANSATLANTICKÝCH VZTAHŮ
Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations

PCTR Newsletter

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PCTR / CEVRO INSTITUT

Jungmannova 17 / 110 00 Praha 1 / Czech Republic

tel.: + 420 221 506 737

email: pctr@vsci.cz / www.cevroinstitut.cz

Message from the Director

Dear supporters,

Our team organized last month, when we commemorated the 16th anniversary of Czech accession to NATO, not only an international conference about European jihadists returning from conflicts in Middle East, but we also hold a meeting with young talented personalities from the United States of America, gave several interviews and published a few articles in the Czech media.

Now, we prepare other interesting events and a policy paper for you. The policy paper entitled „The Czech Republic in Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU“ will be soon available on the CEVRO Institute website and on our Facebook page in PDF format for your mobile phones, tablets or computers.

As always, we prepared our traditional PCTR Newsletter containing information about the events we organized as well as a brief overview of the most important news in Euro-Atlantic relations.

Yours faithfully,

*Alexandr Vondra
Director*

PCTR Bulletin

On 11th March, the director of the Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations (PCTR) **Dr. Alexandr Vondra** met with young **talented personalities from the United States of America**, who are members of the White House Fellows Program.

The White House Fellows Program was founded by President L. B. Johnson in 1964. Selected individuals have, among other things, opportunities to participate in the federal government's activities, educational programs or study abroad. One of their trips has been to Prague in order to understand Czech-US relations, transformation period, history and society as such. These and other topics, for example the role of the former Czech President Vaclav Havel, NGOs and current Russian aggression, were discussed during the meeting.



The international conference entitled "European Jihadists" organized by the Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations (PCTR) and International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) at IDC College in Herzliya took place on 19th March at the CEVRO Institute. The event focused on one of the most serious threats for European security.



Dr. Ivan Langer, the former Interior Minister and current Chairman of the Board of the CEVRO Institute, opened the event. **Mr. Tomas Pojar**, Vice President of the CEVRO Institute, made short opening remarks and hosted the conference and following discussion. The other distinguished panelists were **Dr. Azeem Ibrahim** (American War College & The Scotland Institute, UK), **Professor Assaf Moghadam** (Academic Affairs, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, Israel) and German journalist **Yassin Musharbash** (Die Zeit).

Mr. Pojar mentioned that it might be surprising that the recruitment of new jihadists is more successful in smaller European countries. *"The public believes that large numbers of jihadists come from France, Great Britain or Germany, but the truth is that if we compare the population, smaller countries are taking the lead"*

– Belgium, Scandinavia, Kosovo, Bosnia or former USSR countries and also Russia. Quite a large number of jihadists come from Turkey,” said Tomas Pojar. He added that there are some 20 thousand people with European passports among the jihadists.

Dr. Azeem Ibrahim spoke about the ways how to stop radicalization of European Muslims. *“It is necessary to treat the cause of terrorism, not the result. We need to give a chance to Muslim community to wipe out Islamism. The best way to fight terrorism is education,”* said Dr. Ibrahim.



Professor Moghadama focused on various types of terrorist groups and models of their cooperation. He stated that the nature of terrorism is changing and a new type of actors is emerging. *“The rule is not only that the groups cooperate. Sometimes, they are even supported by a particular state. ‘State terrorism’ is reality,”* explained the expert.



Mr. Yassin Musharbash based his speech on real stories of Europeans who left their countries to fight for Islamists. He gained this information from public sources – for example various social networks and websites. The respected journalist also introduced his findings about motivation of young Europeans who joined Islamists. *“The motivation is often unclear. Many Islamists don’t know anything about Islam or Koran before they leave. Sometimes, it is not about the ideology, but much more about some kind of teenage rebellion or naïve desire for adventure,”* he said.

Mr. Musharbash added that the society should not fear Muslims and their religion, because traditional Islam and its knowledge presented by real Islamic scholars is the most powerful weapon



against Islamists. *“Traditional Islam is not our enemy. Some of the Islamic scholars decided to de-radicalize the radicalized youth using traditional Islam,”* explained Mr. Musharbash. *“It is hard work, but they can achieve results we may never get,”* he said. **The video record from the event is available [here](#).**

Events in Euro-Atlantic relations (March 2015)

On 4th March United States announced their intention to continue strengthening its permanent presence on the European continent from now on. It is going to take place under the terms of the "Atlantic Resolve", which is a direct response to concerns about the recent actions of the Russian Federation. The Czech Republic is one of the countries which should participate in this practice. This reference provoked stormy reactions throughout the Czech political scene.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/land/army/2015/03/03/atlantic-resolve-may-expand-army-official-says/24332169/>

President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, did not rule out that his country could become a member of NATO in the future. He described it as a "possibility", but the decision solely depends on the Finnish voters, who would decide on membership in a referendum. All discussions about it will be held after the April elections, from which a new government should arise. Finland is going to participate in the international joint exercises with other countries associated in the Partnership for Peace program. For example, NATO exercise CMX focused on crisis management, which should take place in the week from 10th March and besides alliance and Finnish troops would involve soldiers from Ukraine, Sweden, Japan and Australia.

<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/leaders/2015/03/05/finland-nato-membership-election-baltic-ukraine/24427371/>

The Ukrainian parliament approved a law on 5th March, which enables to expand its military by about a third. The bill is still waiting for Petro Poroshenko's signature. The prepared proposal expects an increase in numbers of the Ukrainian armed forces by about 68000 soldiers; the total must not exceed 250000.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63634360-ukrajinska-armada-se-rozsiri-az-o-tretinu-umozni-to-novy-zakon>

According to Reuters, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, expressed on 8th March in an interview with German newspaper a genuine support for the creation of European army to confront new threats in a changed security situation, posed not only by the Russian Federation.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/08/us-eu-defence-juncker-idUSKBN0M40KL20150308>

"Because of the terrorist attacks, there is a growing fear of Islam in the world. But people must not yield to this fear; on the contrary it is necessary to be tolerant to Muslims, because it is mainly up to Muslims to fight with radicalism." said Jordan's King Abdullah II on 10th March in his formal speech in the European Parliament.

<http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/evropskaunie/ zprava/nenavist-vuci-muslimum-nahrava-dzihadistum-rekl-jordansky-kral-v-ep--1464753>

Russian aggression threatens European security. That is what the Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Brian P. McKeon told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 10th March. Russia is actively supporting violence in Ukraine, sending weapons and equipment to separatist forces and violating the "immediate and comprehensive cease-fire".

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128330>

The principal message about the EU enlargement came on 12th March. Greenland refused to continue negotiating its EU membership. National interests are supposedly better defensible outside the EU, remarked the Foreign Minister of Greenland B. G. Sveinsson.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/12/iceland-drops-european-union-membership-bid>

In Russia in mid-March, more precisely on 16th March, began a giant military maneuvers throughout the territory of the Russian Federation and besides ground forces included the Air Force and Navy. This great exercise was supposed to be a demonstration of force and the response to the Alliance exercise "Joint Viking", organized by Norway, making the largest practice of the Norwegian Armed Forces in the last half century.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/16/us-russia-military-exercises-idUSKBN0MC0JO20150316>

Situation of human rights in Crimea after its annexation by Russia deteriorated dramatically according to the Czech Embassy in Kiev. Czech diplomats warned about it in a secret report. The situation is especially critical for Crimean Tatars. In the document is written about beatings, torture, intimidation and false accusations.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63701180-tajna-zprava-ceskych-diplomatu-rusko-na-krymu-porusuje-veskera-lidska-prava>

The winner of the elections in Israel was the right-wing Likud party led by the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The election results were announced in the evening, the same day (on March 18). The assumptions that Netanyahu's victory could lead to a deterioration of relations with the United States, was fulfilled in the upcoming days.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31933326>

At the summit in Brussels on Thursday, 19th March, European leaders supported the intention to create energy union. The project should provide secure, cheap energy for citizens and businesses and reduce European dependence on gas imports from Russia as well as strengthen European position when negotiating energy contracts. European Union should prepare specific legislative proposals in the upcoming months.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63711960-evropsti-lidri-na-summitu-podporili-plan-na-vznik-energeticke-unie>

Pentagon indicated a progress in the training of the Ukrainian National Guard. Army Col, as a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters on a short briefing held on 20 March, that the training could begin in late April. Ukrainian guards should be trained by American paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade "Sky Soldiers". Training should be involved around 290 US soldiers who will train six Ukraine National Guard companies with a focus on internal security and territorial defense. Pentagon also announced that it has entered command of US forces in Europe (EUROCOM) to prepare a new large joint military practice called "Auster Challenge 2015", which will take place in Great Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany. Around 4,000 members of the US armed forces should be involved in this practice.

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128413>

A big commotion was caused by sharp words of the Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Denmark on 21st March. Russia, through its ambassador in Denmark, warned the Scandinavian monarchy against the possibility of a nuclear attack on the Danish Royal Navy ships. It could happen in the case that Denmark would join the Alliance missile defense project. Danish Foreign

Minister Martin Lidegaard called the Russian threat "unacceptable". Missile defense should serve as a shield against attacks of "rogue states" and it is not directed against the Russian Federation.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/denmark/11487509/Russia-warns-Denmark-its-warships-could-become-nuclear-targets.html>

American convoys entered the Czech Republic on 22nd March. They were coming from Estonia, through the Baltic states, Poland and the Czech Republic to their home base in Germany as a part of the Operation Dragoon Ride. On 29th March, convoys arrived to the Czech Republic and the last vehicles should leave our country at the beginning of next month.

http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/evropa/_zprava/z-estonska-vyjel-americky-konvoj-ceka-ho-cesta-dlouha-2000-kilometru--1469315

On Monday 23rd March Ted Cruz, a senator from Texas, as the first Republican, publicly announced that he intends to apply for the post of President of the United States next year. According to the AP and Reuters, Cruz is just the first of many important personalities, who confirmed their candidacy. Scott Walker, Governor of Wisconsin and Jeb Bush, former Governor of Florida are his potential rivals within the Republican Party.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63727380-republikani-maji-prvniho-kandidata-na-prezidenta-texaskeho-senatora-cruze>

On Tuesday, 24th March, Russia announced that it would probably resume regular tourist flights in space in 2018. Russia wants to take advantage of future vacancy in the Soyuz spacecraft, which is rented by Americans at the moment. The TASS agency published it on Tuesday. By the end of 2017, Russia wants the first manned commercial flights.

<http://zahranicni.ihned.cz/c1-63735580-rusko-chce-obnovit-pravidelne-turisticke-lety-do-kosmu-v-lodich-sojuz>

United States retain the remaining troops in Afghanistan throughout the year 2015. The decision to keep nearly 10,000 troops in the country at least until the end of this year is supposed to help the Afghan government with expected heavy fighting. US President Barack Obama said that after a meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on 25th March. Barack Obama complied with the request of the Afghan government.

http://www.rozhlas.cz/zpravy/amerika/_zprava/spojene-staty-zpomali-stahovani-jednotek-z-afghanistanu--1470431

The clash of two Ukrainian oligarchs culminated in the departure of one of them from office. On 25th March the Chief of Dnepropetrovsk's region and one of the richest Ukrainians Ihor Kolomojskyj resigned after a meeting with the President Petro Poroshenko. The country is now anxiously waiting to see if the oligarch's conflict will not become a sparks for further conflict.

<http://archiv.ihned.cz/c1-63745540-porosenko-odvolal-oligarchu-valecnika>

"Every country has the right to practice its military power, but Russia, with its massive maneuvers, creates an image of an assertive state that does not hesitate to use force to change borders. Russia, responsible for the aggressive actions in Ukraine, invested heavily in new capacity in the field of defense, exercise much more and is willing to use force, not only to exercise, but also to change the borders and annexation of other countries," said the General Secretary of NATO Stoltenberg in Washington on 26th March.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/stoltenberg-o-ruske-hybridni-valce-dui-na-zpravy.aspx?c=A150326_151425_na_zpravy_m00

Defense Secretary Ash Carter met on 27th March with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Pentagon to discuss critical transatlantic security issues, according to DoD news release. The two leaders discussed Russian actions in Ukraine and the status of NATO assurance activities, instability in North Africa and the Middle East, and allied efforts in Afghanistan, the release said. Finally, both politicians agreed on "common values" and the necessity to continue working together on creating the joint 'Quick response' forces. Conversely, during his visit, the Secretary General was not received by US President Barack Obama in Washington.

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128474>,

http://www.natoaktual.cz/na_media.aspx?r=na_media&c=A150325_165450_na_media_m02#--obama-neprijme-stoltenberga-behem-jeho-navstevy-washingtonu

At the end of the month media informed about the deployment of twelve F-15 Eagle fighters and 200 airmen from the Florida Air National Guard in Europe this week as a part of the U.S. and NATO buildup and training effort to deter Russian aggression. All equipment and personnel from the 125th Fighter Wing based in Jacksonville, Fla., were expected to arrive in Europe by mid-April for a possible six-month deployment.

<http://defensetech.org/2015/03/27/air-national-guard-f-15s-to-europe-to-deter-moscow/>