



Czech EU Presidency 2009

Questions & Answers







Dear Readers,

In my capacity as Vice Prime Minister for European Affairs, I am happy to present this brochure which sets out to explain to general public what will be at stake in the first half of 2009. In other words, what the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union will mean for the Czech Republic and for each one of us.

To say that the Presidency is a great opportunity for a small country may perhaps sound high-flown, but such an opportunity it undoubtedly is. The Presidency means an ideal opportunity for our country to make itself known and prove to our colleagues in the European Union and worldwide that we can take care not only of ourselves, but also of others. For six months the Czech Republic will lead a body comprising nearly half a billion Europeans. The way we tackle this task may have an impact on our reputation and status for a number of years to come.

Needless to say, this does not mean that we will be able to do whatever we want. Quite the contrary. We will act in the European spirit and chair a debate involving twenty-seven countries. The world will thus perceive the Czech voice as the voice of the Union. Our people will manage difficult negotiations that should lead to solutions acceptable not only for the Czech Republic, but also for another twenty-six EU Member States.

Naturally, it is vital to get well prepared for such a role. That is why already last year we started to cooperate with France and Sweden, experienced partners with whom we share the rotating EU Presidency. We are jointly preparing an eighteen-month working programme of our Presidencies to cater for priorities of each country and ensure continuity of operation of the European Union. With a view to the expected entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, we are already preparing for various possible scenarios concerning the Czech Presidency.

It will be essential to manage political negotiations and preparations, but it will be likewise as important to make sure that the Presidency is not just an empty word for our citizens. We would like you to be involved. The European Union often seems too distant from everyday life. The Presidency is an opportunity when each of us will be able to be involved. Last year, for instance, everybody who wanted to have his or her good idea to be made use of could enter a competition for a Presidency logo. Going forward, we will cooperate more intensively with companies, experts, interpreters, students and numerous other entities to provide for European meetings and other events in the capital as well as regions.

You can find up-to-date information on the web pages of the Office of the Government of the CR and on other information servers. There is plenty of work ahead of us in the months leading up to June 2009, but I believe that in the end we will manage it all successfully and that the Czech Republic will once and for all confirm its position on the European scene.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexandr Vondra'.

Alexandr Vondra

Vice Prime Minister for European Affairs, May 2008



What is the EU Presidency?

In general, the term 'EU Presidency' means that one Member State presides over the Council of the European Union. Member States assume this role on a rota basis every six months. During that period the presiding country is the voice and face of the EU, since it speaks on behalf of all twenty-seven Member States. At the same time it prepares and chairs meetings of the Council of the EU, represents it at meetings with other EU institutions (European Parliament, European Commission) and last but not least represents the EU externally, e.g. in international organisations and meetings with third countries. During the Presidency about three thousand meetings at various levels, from the highest to the lowest, take place in Brussels, the presiding country and elsewhere in the world. On average, approximately twenty-five meetings have to be provided for per day.

Why is the Presidency important and at the same time demanding?

To exaggerate slightly, the Presidency is like directing and managing a huge concert orchestra, but is much more demanding: we will have to be producers, musicians and also conductors of a concert that will last for six months. Undoubtedly, it will be the most demanding task resulting from our membership in the EU. As the presiding country we will coordinate the adoption of political decisions and mediate compromises by and between European Union Member States. If the Czech Presidency is a success, it will enhance the prestige of the Czech Republic both in the EU and in the world. Moreover, our Presidency will be a certain test of how mature the Czech civil service is, as it will test its diplomatic and organisational capabilities. The main aim of the Czech Republic in the above tasks will be to successfully meet the challenge and thus confirm the role of a capable and advanced country that has a strong position among other European Union Member States. A country that can listen to other Member States, anticipate their opinions and play the role of mediator. And also a country that will come up with its own initiatives and will leave its own imprint on contemporary Europe.

‘Europe without barriers’ – the motto of the Czech Presidency

By this motto, approved by the Czech government in February 2007, the Czech Republic expresses its will to remove barriers that still exist among EU Member States, notably in the field of the internal market and free movement of goods, services, persons and capital, including the complex legal regulations of the EU and Member States. These barriers do not allow for the potential of individual countries and the European Union as a whole to be fully utilised. The motto also stands for the external openness of Europe towards the whole world. In 2009 we will also commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain and five years from the largest European Union enlargement in history. That is why the motto of the Czech Presidency has such a symbolic dimension.

How much will it cost?

To allow for quality and reliable provision during the Czech Presidency, the government has allocated CZK 1.9 billion from the central budget for the years 2007-2009. CZK 200 million were approved for 2007, CZK 700 million for 2008 and CZK 1 billion has been set aside to cater for the Presidency as such in 2009. If benchmarked with other EU Member States, the Czech Presidency will be one of the less costly ones, comparable for instance with the costs incurred by Slovenia. Individual ministries will have another CZK 1.4 billion at their disposal. If it had not been for the Presidency, this amount would have been used by the ministries for other purposes related to the EU agenda. Hence, it does not mean any additional costs for the state budget. It is anticipated that sponsoring will also be used, e.g. to provide for transport, fuel and carrying costs, office technology and refreshments for delegates. Individual regions will also get involved in financing the Presidency, for instance by supporting accompanying cultural events or providing regionally specific gifts, etc.

Presidency events are always financed by the budget of the presiding country. However, a part of the costs related to organising meetings in the Czech Republic will also be covered from the EU budget, such as interpreting costs during some informal ministerial meetings of the Council or part of the travel expenses pertaining to working group meetings.

What do ‘team Presidency’ and ‘the 18-month programme’ mean?

The three countries, which will hold office between July 2008 and December 2009 have been cooperating on the 18-month programme of their successive Presidencies with the aim of ensuring better continuity of work at the Council of the EU. This mainly involves agendas that these countries will mutually ‘inherit’ and that cannot be solved within one Presidency. The Czech Republic will form a trio with France and Sweden for the period between 1 July 2008 and 31 December 2009. The Czech Republic officially launched negotiations at political level with its partners in September 2007 in Prague. However, individual ministries have already been intensively cooperating with their French and Swedish counterparts since Spring 2007. A previous 18-month programme for the period between 1 January 2007 and 30 June 2008 had been prepared by Germany together with Portugal and Slovenia.

What is the Council of the EU?

Apart from the European Commission and European Parliament, the Council of the EU (formerly the Council of Ministers) or simply the Council, is one of the key actors in the European decision-making process. Together with the European Parliament the Council approves legal regulations of the EU and other decisions. The Council is made up of national ministers representing individual Member States. It is therefore not correct to use the argument that sometimes appears in the press, namely that 'Brussels has decided' on this or that, because in most cases it is the Council that takes decisions, and thus all Member States. The General Secretariat of the Council of the EU based in Brussels is in charge of smooth course of negotiations. The Council does not have a permanent composition: ministers from Member States meet there according to the particular agenda, e.g. Ministers of the Environment meet in the Environment Council, etc.

Overview of up-to date composition of the Council of the EU at ministerial level:

- *General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC)*
- *Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN)*
- *Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA)*
- *Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)*
- *Competitiveness Council (Internal Market, Industry and Research) (COCOM)*
- *Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (TTE)*
- *Agriculture and Fisheries Council*
- *Environment Council*
- *Education, Youth and Culture Council (EYC)*

What is the difference between the European Council, Council of the EU and Council of Europe?

The Council of the EU has already been mentioned above. However, how do the European Council and the Council of Europe differ from it? The European Council is the supreme body of the European Union, at whose meetings the highest political representatives (Prime Ministers or Presidents) from all Member States meet. Its task is mainly to define the direction of development of European integration and search for joint political solutions of topical issues. It takes place three or four times a year in Brussels or in exceptional cases in the presiding country. The meeting is always chaired by the supreme political representative of the presiding country. In the Czech Republic, the Prime Minister would assume this role.

The Council of Europe is not an institution of the European Union. It is a separate international organisation established already in 1949 with the main aim of protecting human rights and parliamentary democracy. It has 47 members and is based in Strasbourg. The best-known institution of the Council of Europe is the European Court of Human Rights.

When will the Czech Republic take on its EU Presidency?

The Czech Republic will take over the leadership of the Union on 1 January 2009 from France and will pass it on to Sweden in the second half of 2009. Following Slovenia the Czech Republic will be only the second new Member State to take on this demanding role. The order according to which Member States will rotate the EU Presidency by 2020 was confirmed by the European Council at the beginning of 2007. When the order was put together, the main criteria considered were the size of the individual countries and their geographical location.

<i>Slovenia</i>	<i>1st half of 2008</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>2nd half of 2014</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>2nd half of 2008</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>1st half of 2015</i>
<i>Czech Republic</i>	<i>1st half of 2009</i>	<i>Luxembourg</i>	<i>2nd half of 2015</i>
<i>Sweden</i>	<i>2nd half of 2009</i>	<i>The Netherlands</i>	<i>1st half of 2016</i>
<i>Spain</i>	<i>1st half of 2010</i>	<i>Slovakia</i>	<i>2nd half of 2016</i>
<i>Belgium</i>	<i>2nd half of 2010</i>	<i>Malta</i>	<i>1st half of 2017</i>
<i>Hungary</i>	<i>1st half of 2011</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>	<i>2nd half of 2017</i>
<i>Poland</i>	<i>2nd half of 2011</i>	<i>Estonia</i>	<i>1st half of 2018</i>
<i>Denmark</i>	<i>1st half of 2012</i>	<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>2nd half of 2018</i>
<i>Cyprus</i>	<i>2nd half of 2012</i>	<i>Austria</i>	<i>1st half of 2019</i>
<i>Ireland</i>	<i>1st half of 2013</i>	<i>Romania</i>	<i>2nd half of 2019</i>
<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>2nd half of 2013</i>	<i>Finland</i>	<i>1st half of 2020</i>
<i>Greece</i>	<i>1st half of 2014</i>		

What does it mean when one says ‘Presidency priorities’?

At the beginning of its term of office each presiding country presents its priorities, i.e. the main objectives it would like to achieve during its Presidency, to the Council of the EU and the European Parliament. These objectives reflect the current situation in the EU and the challenges the Union faces in a particular period, which are significant for the relevant country. When selecting its priorities, the Czech Republic follows not only its own preference, but also has to take heed of plans of the European Commission or the interests of France and Sweden – the two countries together with which it is preparing the joint 18-month programme. Besides, it also has to take into account the long-term direction of the EU or anticipated global political and economic developments during the period when the Presidency will take place.

How are the Czech Presidency priorities being shaped?

Already in February 2007 the Czech government approved a working document as a basis for discussion that would deliver the Czech Presidency's priorities, which would be pro-reformist but consensual. Deputies and senators in the Foreign and European Affairs Committees of both Chambers of Parliament were invited to participate in the debate together with the Czech Members of the European Parliament, Association of Regions of the CR, Union of Towns and Municipalities, social partners and experts from academia, NGOs and businesses. Their comments have given rise to a revised document on priorities for the Czech Presidency, adopted in October

by the governmental EU Committee and subsequently published on the government web site. The 'competitive and open Europe' priority is currently the flagship of the Czech Presidency. It aims mainly at enhancing the internal market and liberalising trade policy. Other priorities include sustainable and secure energy, a debate on the future of the EU budget, agricultural and structural policies, cooperation in justice and home affairs as well as foreign affairs, transatlantic relations, Western Balkans and Eastern Europe.

How does the Presidency work in practice?

It is up to the presiding country to organise, provide for, convene and chair all meetings of the Council and its working groups that negotiate EU legislation, prepare the agenda for those meetings and determine the order of debated issues according to its priorities. Another major task of a presiding country is to try to strike widely acceptable compromises. In important deliberations on controversial issues, when opinions of individual countries differ, the presiding country serves as the mediator that strives to find common ground. This role will be played above all by Czech ministers and by Czech chairpersons of working groups at the working group level, i.e. civil servants sent to Brussels by the appropriate ministries. On behalf of the EU, a presiding country also negotiates with third countries and international organisations and represents the Council of the EU in negotiations with other EU institutions, mainly the European Parliament and European Commission. Among other things, Czech ministers justify individual steps taken by the Council in the European Parliament. The Czech Republic has to map thoroughly all topics that may or should already be debated during the Presidency (known as sectoral agendas) during the lead-up to the Presidency in the course of 2008. On the eve of the Presidency this preparation will logically be reflected in the provisional agendas of the Councils of the EU, be it formal ones in Brussels or informal ones in the Czech Republic and individual working groups and subgroups.

What impact will the Treaty of Lisbon have on the Presidency?

If all EU Member States complete ratification of the new Treaty upon which the European Union will be based in the future, either by the end of 2008 or in the first half of 2009, this will apparently imply several important changes for the Czech Presidency, as well as all future Presidencies. The European Council would then have its permanent President. Similarly, the External Relations Council would be presided by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. None the less, Czech ministers would continue to chair meetings of the remaining Councils of the EU and Czech representatives would chair most of the working groups and other working bodies of the Council. In general, the presiding country would continue to be in charge of managing internal operation of the Union, whereas externally the EU would be represented by newly appointed representatives.

Who coordinates the lead-up to the Presidency in the Czech Republic?

In February 2007 a coordination body, responsible for overall coordination and communication of the preparations of the Czech Republic for its Presidency of the Council of the EU was established at the Office of the Government of the CR. The Czech government entrusted Alexandr Vondra,

Vice Prime Minister for European Affairs, with its management. There are two Sections operating, one is the Czech EU Presidency Section, managed by Jana Hendrichová, which ensures smooth logistics and organisation. Deputy Vice Prime Minister Marek Mora heads the European Affairs Section that is in charge of preparing topics for the Presidency as well as the coordination and analysis of the Czech positions in negotiations in the EU.

How many civil servants will be needed for the Czech Presidency?

Whether the Czech Presidency will be a success depends on the interplay of a number of factors. Human resources are surely a prerequisite. In 2007 – 2008 another 365 servants have already joined or will join the civil service, of whom 260 in 2008. The proposed rise in the number of civil service jobs is extraordinary and temporary, with the aim of managing the greater number of meetings and volume of work in the lead-up to, and during, the Presidency. The highest recruitment of civil servants is intended at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Agriculture, due to their agendas. The Permanent Representation of the CR to the EU in Brussels will also increase staffing from the present 110 civil servants to 220. The newly established jobs in the civil service will gradually decrease in the second half of 2009 onwards and will be terminated by the end of 2009 at the latest.

What requirements do civil servants participating in the Presidency have to meet?

All civil servants involved in preparing the Presidency must have working knowledge of English and selected persons also have to have knowledge of French. In addition, a very good level of knowledge of EU affairs will be required and personal experience in specialised fields will also be invaluable. During the Presidency, chairpersons of working groups and their substitutes will have to act as skilled compromise negotiators both in Brussels and in the Czech Republic, so that ambassadors and ministers who adopt final decisions at political level will have to deal with as few controversial issues as possible. This ability will be one of the criteria according to which other Member States will evaluate the skills of the Czech administration. This is one of the reasons why a special Presidency training system has been established with a number of mandatory courses for civil servants. Special Presidency preparatory courses have also been prepared for ministers.

How are civil servants being prepared?

The training that selected civil servants will have to complete is organised by the Institute of State Administration attached to the Ministry of Interior of the CR and plenty of courses are taught by lecturers from prestigious foreign organisations. At present the Institute offers over a hundred courses related to the Presidency including language courses mandatory for all civil servants. One- to two-week training is mostly done in groups. Mandatory training includes among other things a two-week course for chairpersons of working groups led by experts from the renowned Irish Public Service Institute, a one-week self-presentation course or a 'negotiation techniques and skills' course organised by the well-known Brussels Centre for European Negotiation and Decision-making. In January 2008 the Presidency Minimum (I) e-learning course was opened to the public, where everyone can test their knowledge about the Presidency at <http://minimum.iss-edu.cz/>.

How many and which meetings will be taking place as part of the Czech Presidency in the Czech Republic?

During its Presidency the Czech Republic will host over 150 meetings at various levels, ranging from ministerial meetings and visits by top representatives of EU institutions to meetings of officials and experts. More than 30,000 participants in meetings will visit the Czech Republic during the course of the Presidency. The agenda and organisation of all meetings will be provided by the Czech Republic in conjunction with the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. The most important events include eleven informal ministerial meetings accompanied by concerts, exhibitions, etc. Besides Prague the meetings will be held in six Czech and Moravian towns and cities, namely Brno, Hluboká nad Vltavou, Litoměřice, Luhačovice, Mariánské Lázně and Olomouc. A number of minor meetings will be held in numerous other towns. Informal ministerial meetings represent a good opportunity to enhance the prestige and attractiveness of individual regions and present their cultural richness and traditions to foreign guests.

The venues of ministerial meetings were decided upon by the Czech government in October 2007 after a detailed analysis. A decisive criterion in selecting venues for informal meetings of the Councils of Ministers of the EU was mainly adequate infrastructure, sufficient conference and accommodation capacities and transport accessibility. The conference venue, its decoration, accreditation, transport, conference technology, interpreting, refreshments, information and presentation materials, accommodation for delegates, accompanying social programme, etc. have to be arranged for all the meetings. In addition, the security of both participants and the meeting venue must be ensured for the deliberations.

Who will be responsible for interpreting and into what languages will meetings be interpreted?

Interpreting services for various types of meetings will have to be provided during the Presidency. Interpreting at informal ministerial meetings in the Czech Republic will be provided for by SCIC, the Interpreting Services of the European Commission. Interpreting at other meetings at a lower level will be provided for centrally through an interpreting agency. The number of languages will depend on the level and type of meeting. As always, ministerial level meetings will be interpreted from and into English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. During the Czech Presidency a number of meetings will also have interpreting from and into Czech. Lower level meetings will be usually interpreted from and into English, French and Czech or may also be conducted without interpreting, depending on the established procedure of the relevant meeting.

SCIC is an internally used acronym of the French name 'Service Common Interprétation-Conférences' and denotes Joint Interpreting and Conference Services of the European Commission which has been active under this name since April 1981. It aims at providing highly qualified interpreters to cover the needs of all European Union institutions. From 2003 these services have been operating within the Directorate-General for Interpreting of the European Commission.



Does the Presidency mean an increased security risk?

Holding Presidency events as such does not represent an increased security risk. These events are mostly smaller-scale ones than e.g. the World Bank and International Monetary Fund Annual Meeting in 2000 or the NATO Summit in Prague in 2002. Meetings organised in the Czech Republic during its Presidency will have an informal nature. Experience from other countries shows that these types of meetings do not pose any major security risks. Security measures implemented as part of the meetings will primarily aim at ensuring smooth running and organisation of the events.

Who is in charge of security during the Presidency?

The Ministry of Interior of the CR and units of the Police of the Czech Republic that report to it will take responsibility for all security measures at Presidency events in the Czech Republic. When ministerial meetings are held on its territory, security will be intensified at meeting venues. However, these measures should not affect the everyday life of citizens. There will be more police officers present, access to specific meeting venues will be limited and there will also be certain traffic restrictions related to the transportation of delegates. The object of these measures is to ensure the safe conduct of meetings in the first place and to minimise their impact on the public.

What will the logo of Czech Presidency look like?

The logo is the basis of the visual presentation of each Presidency. Thus, already in July 2007 a public tender was announced to design a logo in which professional graphic designers, graphics students and general public could enrol by the end of October 2007. Several hundred designs entered the competition, of which a committee composed mainly of graphic design and marketing communication experts short-listed five designs. The winning design was selected in January 2008. However, in line with the European Union traditions, the logo will remain a secret until officially revealed in autumn 2008. It will be presented then to both the domestic and foreign public, together with the overall visual image of the Czech Presidency.

Will the Czech Presidency be only about political deliberations?

No. The official agenda of the Czech Presidency will be accompanied by interesting cultural events organised both in the capital city and in the Czech regions as well as in Brussels and elsewhere abroad. Opening and closing cultural events are usually held at the beginning and the end of each Presidency. The Czech Presidency will interlink them through its lead idea of 'Europe without barriers' and will utilise the opposites between winter, when the Presidency begins and summer, when it comes to an end. The Presidency will be opened by a classical music concert and will end by means of an open-air music festival targeting the general public.

Will there be any Presidency memory gifts provided?

Gifts and souvenirs serve as a great way of providing participants, journalists and citizens with a pleasant and practical memory of the Presidency. Gifts may be divided into several categories: gifts for ministers, high state representatives, representatives of the European Commission and European Parliament and other major officials, then gifts for interpreters and media representatives and last but not least ordinary gifts such as pens or notepads. The aim of promoting the Czech Republic is crucial in choosing promotional materials and gifts for delegation representatives and political representatives from EU Member States. Other items are mainly practical in nature.

Where can the Czech Presidency be found on the Internet?

The official web portal of the Czech Presidency at www.eu2009.cz will present the Czech Presidency and will be one of key communication tools. The web pages will be available in Czech, English and French. Target groups will include most notably the media, experts, civil servants from the EU Member States and third countries and the general public. The portal will provide the latest information about ongoing meetings of the Council of the EU, joint statements, speeches or cultural events during the Czech Presidency. It will also provide a full service for the media (press releases, photos, video and audio material, calendar of events) including on-line accreditation for journalists. As is common in the EU, a limited version of the portal will be launched towards the end of 2008 so as to enable on-line accreditation of journalists for the Presidency events sufficiently in advance. An up-to-date operation with all the necessary information will then be launched on 1 January 2009. Before then information on the lead-up to the Czech Presidency can be found on the web pages of the Office of Government of the CR at <http://eu.vlada.cz>.

How can one participate in the lead-up to the Presidency?

In the context of preparing and holding the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, new civil servants will be recruited by individual ministries and other state bodies in the course of 2008. In case of interest, contact the relevant Ministry (preferably through its HR department), which is best suited to your educational attainment, job experience or center of interest. Some ministries post job opportunities on their web pages. If you would like to receive information about job opportunities in the Office of the Vice Prime Minister for European Affairs, please send an e-mail to zamestnani.eu@vlada.cz.

How can a businessperson get involved in preparing the Presidency?

Businesses may get involved in providing for the Presidency through public tenders for related suppliers or services. More detailed information is regularly published in the Public Procurement Information System – Publishing Subsystem ('Informační systém o veřejných zakázkách – Uveřejňovací subsystém') at www.isvzus.cz and also in the Public Procurement ('Veřejné zakázky') and Latest News ('Aktuality') sections at <http://www.vlada.cz/cs/urad/zakazky> and <http://eu.vlada.cz>. In some cases suppliers are allowed to promote their products and services through sponsoring partnership. Businesses may also get involved through financial sponsoring.

Where can be found the latest information about the lead-up to the Czech Presidency?

The latest information can be found on the web pages of the Office of the Government of the CR and click onto a section devoted to the European Union at <http://eu.vlada.cz> or to the Euroskop.cz portal and its Czech EU Presidency ('Předsednictví ČR v EU') at www.euroskop.cz/predsednictvi. If you have any questions related to the Presidency, you can also visit some of the thirteen regional Eurocentres, call the free-of-charge Eurofon line 800 200 200 or send your query to predsednictvi@vlada.cz.



WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Web pages of the Office of the Government of the CR

<http://eu.vlada.cz>

Euroskop.cz – web portal about the European Union

www.euroskop.cz

Web pages of the Permanent Representation of the CR to the EU in Brussels

www.czechrep.be

Eurocentres – information centres about the European Union



For more information about Eurocentres please go to www.euroskop.cz/eurocentra

Eurofon 800 200 200 – free-of-charge information line about the EU

Monday to Friday 10.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m.

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