EU News
Monthly Journal

Number 76,
January 2010

ČESKÁ SPOŘITELNA

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Dear readers,

It is hard to imagine a more dramatic and more eventful year full of unexpected turns and twists in the continuous development of the process of European integration than the last year. We would like to have this year 2010 noticeably quieter, with less unsatisfactory news and with much more optimistic prospects for the future.

It will most likely continue to be true in this year that the economic topics will overshadow all others. A mere quick glance at the economic priorities of the just started Spanish Presidency has suggested that this year will not only be a period of approaching the longingly awaited economic recovery, but also the time in which a deeper discussion on the longer-term anticipated future and economic prospects of the EU should take place.

One of the major economic topics of this year with the necessary social and human “overlap” will be the employment and the unemployment control. And not just because Spain, the presiding country, has one of the EU’s worst characteristics of labour market trends, which after a period of relative success with the creation of new jobs, once again returns the country to a situation experienced almost 20 years ago when it had very grimly evolving parameters attributed to labour markets. Generally, the issue of unemployment seems to start to be the most distressing manifestation of the crisis throughout the EU. In November 2008, the average rate of unemployment in the EU-27 was 7.5% while at the end of last year, the unemployment rate stopped at values oscillating around 9.5%. The turning point expected most probably in the half of 2010 would represent the achievement of a level of more than 10%.The tricky nature of the average parameter is evidenced by the fact that the unemployment rate in Spain has reached a level pretty close to 20% and that Latvia has even reached 21%.

This year in the economic area will certainly be also the period of finding fiscal consolidation after the crisis has drastically worsened all conceivable characteristics acceptable to fiscal discipline and a period of applying the so-called exit strategies, particularly in those economies where the most severe crisis symptoms would slowly begin to vanish. This year will also be the time when the debate is likely to intensify over the long-term financial prospects of the EU after 2013, which will dramatically suggest whether and in what amount it will be possible for the respective member states to continue to benefit from the EU funds.

In particular, Spain’s focus on the Mediterranean and Latin America should lead to the strengthening of the EU’s relations with these unquestionably interesting and prospective territories. We wish to ensure that even in 2010 the field of European integration would not be a year of futility, but rather the year when the EU at least starts to recover economically and as a whole, gains a greater degree of respect and esteem of the other players of the global “game”.

Petr Zahradník

The Spanish State Secretary for European Affairs Diego López Garrido presented the priorities of the Spanish Presidency The representatives of the EU and the Latin American countries have agreed to end the longstanding dispute over the European tariffs on bananas, which will be reduced in the future. The ministers of EU member states have decided to extend the duties on imports of shoes from China and Vietnam for another 15 months.

POLITICS

Spain takes over the EU Presidency

The Spanish State Secretary for European Affairs Diego López Garrido revealed the **priorities** of the Spanish EU Presidency to take place in the 1st half of 2010:

1. New jobs and the economy

Spain has chosen economy as its main priority, especially **the fight with the economic crisis and the creation of new jobs.** The selection of this issue is not accidental. Spain belongs to the Eurozone countries facing the highest unemployment. Other priorities in the economic field mentioned by López Garrido included the adoption of the post-Lisbon strategy and the approval of new funds for the control of the international financial system.

2. Implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon

López Garrido has said that paradoxically, we have tools, but we have no policies. He referred to certain measures (e.g. the "citizens' initiative") introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, which, however, exist only in theory so far. According to López Garrido, Spain intends to **develop or create the necessary tools.**

3. Citizens

According to López Garrido, the EU of today is very remote and impenetrable to the Europeans and, therefore, Spain will seek to remedy this situation by enforcing a more ambitious social agenda. Specifically, it will focus on the implementation of the Stockholm **Programme for Freedom, Security and Justice and on the adoption of the anti-discrimination directive** to encourage the EU to combat violence against women.

4. Foreign affairs

The fourth point in the agenda of the Spanish Presidency is the area of foreign policy, specifically the **transformation of the EU into a real global player.** This is related to the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, which established very important tools for foreign policy – the President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, together with the EU diplomatic service.

It will be interesting to see how after the coming into effect of the Lisbon Treaty, the **division of powers will work in practice between the Prime Minister of the presiding country** (José Zapatero) **and the President of the European Council** (Herman Van Rompuy).

www.eu2010.es

FOREIGN TRADE

The Banana War Ends

The European Union and the representatives of Latin American, African and Caribbean countries have approved an **agreement that puts an end to the long-standing dispute over bananas.** The signing of the agreement is planned for 2010.

The content of the agreement is the commitment of the European Union, the world's largest importer of bananas, to **cut significantly the tariffs on their import from Latin America,** which has long complained of discrimination. The EU-27 will also provide 200 million euros to banana producers in some African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

The money will go specifically to the countries that mostly used to be European colonies and **had a privileged status** (could use duty-free treatment). This will be disrupted by the new agreement because it will increase competition from the other developing countries.

The key role in the **negotiating of the compromise was played by the head of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Pascal Lamy,** who hopes that the agreement will start the next round of world trade liberalisation. Lamy has said he believes that this spirit of creativity, pragmatism and diplomacy will also be transferred to the trade talks started at Doha.

How import tariffs will be reduced? The whole process will take place in eight steps, when first, they will drop to 148 euros per tonne and **in the final year of 2017, the importers should pay 114 euros per tonne of imported bananas,** while today they must pay 176 euros. Because the agreement must be approved by all 27 member states (which represents the translation into 23 languages), we can wait for its signing some six to nine months.

The Latin American countries promised in **turn to the European Union to waive all legal actions against discrimination** of American producers on the EU markets and not to require any further concessions on the trade talks started in 2001 in Doha, Qatar (Doha Round).

The conclusion of the agreement is good news for the consumers in Europe who will **"get more than what they pay".**

http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=500

The EU Extended Duties, Asian Shoes Won't be Cheaper

The Council of the European Union approved the **extension of import duties on leather shoes from China and Vietnam** for another 15 months despite the fact that it had

not been recommend in mid-November by the European Anti-Dumping Committee consisting of the representatives of all EU-27 countries.

From 3 January, the importers **must pay for shoes a duty of 16.5% when importing from China and 10% from Vietnam.** China reacted immediately by saying that it will submit a protest against the EU decision to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The spokesperson of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce Yao Jian has said that **China feels extreme dissatisfaction.** The spokesperson added that China disagrees with the extension of anti-dumping measures in whatever form and will refer the solution of this problem to the WTO. China will take adequate steps to protect Chinese industry.

The decision of the member states makes the sellers of leather shoes as well as their major producers unhappy, because they are afraid that **it will lead to an increase in end prices** and thus to lower sales. Shoes from China and Vietnam make up about one third of the total sales in Europe.

The European Commission **introduced the duty on leather shoes from China and Vietnam for the first time in 2006,** in response to the complaints of the EU producers who were not able to compete with the cheap imports from Asia. They claimed that both these countries were unfairly subsidising domestic producers, which allowed them to cut their costs and thus the end prices to a minimum.

Although Malta, Austria and Germany expressed reluctance to extend the duties before yesterday's vote, they abstained at last and allowed its approval. The duties are criticized not only by traders, large producers and consumer organisations, but also by some MEPs.

For instance, the Conservative MEP Robert Study has said that **it is absurd that the EU decided to increase the price of shoes** at a time when we try in every possible way to promote consumer demand; it is crucial that the basic goods remain as cheap as possible during crisis.

http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1681

FINANCE

The Ministers Approved the Reform of the Supervision of Financial Markets

After long negotiations at the Ecofin meeting, the EU Finance Ministers agreed on how the **system of supervision of the financial institutions in the EU,** which would help protect Europe against a repeat of another financial crisis, should look like in the future.

The member countries agreed yesterday on **the form of three new regulators.** The draft was finally agreed also by the UK, which received guarantees that the EU regulators would not be entitled to take such a decision that would affect the fiscal sovereignty of the given state.

Based on the agreement, the European System of Financial Supervisors (ESFS) will be formed by three new EU authorities, which will be responsible for supervising their respective market areas:

- **European Banking Authority** (EBA) will be responsible for supervision of banks;
- **European Market and Securities Authority** (ESMA) will supervise the securities markets; and
- **European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority** (EIOPA) will supervise insurance companies and pension funds.

The final agreement was reached after the ministers agreed on a compromise containing **three guarantees supplementing the agreement.** The first guarantee gives the member states the right to appeal against a decision of one of the supervisors with the Council for Economic and Financial Affairs (Ecofin). The second guarantee stipulates that a decision can be averted by a simple majority, i.e. at least 14 member countries. If these measures do not help, the respective member state may turn with its request to the European Council.

The compromise also supposes that the **new EU supervisory authorities will not be able to make decisions** that would regard specific financial institutions in the case of a crisis or dispute between the national supervision authorities. They would retain such a power only in the event that some of the financial institutions would breach the EU legislation.

The European entrepreneurial organisations complain that the member states have not yet been able and willing to put into practice the European Act for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. Serbian President Boris Tadić handed his country's official application for EU membership to the Swedish Prime Minister. The deadline, by which the member states were obliged to implement the new directive on audiovisual services, expired in mid-December.

However, it is far from certain whether the new authorities will be created exactly in this form, since they are subject to the vote of the European Parliament within the framework of the joint decision procedure. The views prevailing in the European Parliament **are rather in favour of further tightening the financial regulation** and, therefore, it may be difficult to find an agreement.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/NewsRoom/loadDocument.aspx?id=350&directory=en/ecofin/&fileName=111706.pdf

The French And the British Will Tax Bankers' Bonuses

The EU-27 leaders are successfully negotiating in Brussels about the scope and form of the supervision of the financial institutions within the EU. This has been **much helped by the draft laws in France and the UK** intended to tax the financial bonuses of high-level managers.

France and the UK are the first EU countries that have committed themselves **to introduce new taxes imposed on the bonuses of bank managers.** The reason stated by both countries is that in the past, the bonus system motivated some bankers to excessively risky investments.

The UK Ministry of Finance announced its plan to introduce such a tax in mid-December when the draft of the new budget was presented. The British government plans to impose the tax of **50% on bonuses in the London City exceeding the amount of 25,000 pounds.** In a letter to the EU leaders, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown wrote before the start of the summit that this tax should make the banks become conscious of their capital possibilities and thoroughly consider the degree of risk when determining the rules for remunerations of more than 25,000 pounds. A similar proposal was also introduced by France.

At the EU Summit, the leaders of the member states generally welcomed the proposals for European legislation, which should regulate **the supervision of the financial sector, the alternative investment funds (AIFM), bonuses and financial derivatives**. Now it is up to the European Parliament to approve the group of three EU control institutions so that the new system could become operational in 2010.

The leaders have also agreed on the EU legislative measures by which the banks **will be forced to hold higher capital reserves "for rainy days"** and to create a transparent system of remuneration.

The tightening of the financial sector regulation aimed at preventing the recurrence of financial crisis is a natural solution. Nevertheless, **the imposition of additional taxes on the bankers is a non-system populist step** that is not going to solve anything (the managers will get their bonuses anyway by some kind of "circumventing the law") and, moreover, it undermines the very essence of a market economy. The tax rules should apply to all equally rather than penalise discriminatorily a selected sector.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/NewsRoom/loadDocument.aspx?id=347&directory=en/ec/&fileName=111877.pdf

ENTERPRISE

The Act for SMEs Has Not Been Applied in Practice

The European entrepreneurial lobby criticises the national parliaments because they **have not been able and willing to put into practice the Small Business Act** (SBA**) for Europe**, although a whole year has passed since its adoption by the European Council. The EU executive, however, is satisfied with the progress so far.

Three European business organisations – **BusinessEurope,** the Association of European Chambers of Commerce **(Eurochambres),** and the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises **(UEAPME)** called on the national and regional leaders in early December to exert greater efforts to take concrete steps.

So far, no great success has been achieved and according to the entrepreneurial associations, the disappointment of the companies is growing. **They have identified the national governments as the main culprits.**

According to Ben Butters, Director for European Affairs at Eurochambres, Brussels did a good job, but the member states are not interested in greater involvement.

Butters has said that with regard to the economic crisis, it is surprising that no measures have been taken that would lead to more effective regulation of business or to the acceleration of payments. The steps taken in these areas would represent immediate and rapid assistance for the enterprises, but only very little was done for this purpose. Butters also called on the European institutions **to force the national governments to take small and medium-sized enterprises seriously.**

Andrea Benassi, Secretary General of UEAPME, has said that some of the proposals for legislative changes contained in the SBA, such as **the reform of the state aid or the reduced VAT rates, were negotiated and approved,** but they must be applied by the member states in order to have any specific effect.

According to Benassi, the main problem is that the fundamental principle contained in the SBA – namely the need to **“Think Small First”** is not sufficiently respected.

Italy and Belgium are the only EU countries that have incorporated the entire SBA into their national schemes. The Irish government has created a work group with the aim of monitoring its implementation.

The European Commission believes that the implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe is going on well, but it **will strive for its implementation at the national level.**

http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/small-business-act/

ENLARGEMENT

An Historic Day for Serbia: It Applied to Join the EU

On 22 December, Serbian President Boris Tadić handed his country’s **application for EU membership** to the Swedish Prime Minister.

According to Serbian President Boris Tadić, the decision of the Serbian government to take the historic step and formally apply for membership in the EU-27 was taken on 19 December, **when visa-free travel started to apply between three Balkan countries of Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia and the Schengen area.** The EU decided on this in late November. Serbia was able to come closer to the gates of the EU also thanks to the unblocking of the interim trade agreement between Belgrade and the EU.

The handing over of the application, however, does not mean an end to Serbia’s efforts. On the contrary, it must overcome many obstacles to become a full member of the EU. The largest of these is **the capture of Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladic,** for whom the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) issued an arrest warrant for war crimes. His capture has been guaranteed by President Tadić who said: We do not do it because of the international tribunal and accession to the European Union, we do it for ourselves, because of reconciliation in the Balkans.

President Tadić also said that his country would **strive in the coming years to implement important economic and legislative reforms** to bring Serbia closer to the European Union. In this regard, the year and a half of the pro-European coalition’s government has been evaluated positively.

After the Swedish Prime Minister Reinfeldt takes over the application from the Serbian President it **will be up to the EU Council to consider the request and whether to accept it.** Nevertheless, the Serbs are optimistic, hoping to become EU members already in 2014.

In view of the internal situation in the European Union, this date is considered very optimistic. After the several years’ marathon of its internal restructuring, the EU was able at long last to breathe a sigh of relief last year after the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the considerations regarding further enlargement are not on the agenda. **In the near future** – within two or three years – **the number of member states might be increased by Croatia and Iceland.** Serbia does not even have the official status of a candidate country yet, let alone having accession negotiations in progress. We could imagine Serbia in the EU not until shortly before 2010.

http://www.se2009.eu/en/meetings_news/2009/12/20/historic_step_for_serbia

INFORMATION SOCIETY

EU Has New Rules for TV Advertising

The deadline by which **the member states had to incorporate into their national legislations the Audiovisual Media Services Directive** (AVMS Directive), which should open up additional sources of income for the television companies, passed on 19 December 2009. So far only three members have done so: Belgium, Slovakia, and Romania. The remaining states have either already approved the relevant legislation, but have not yet notified the Commission of it, or – like the Czech Republic – **have been just discussing the Audiovisual Act.**

The Commission admonished the other states and reminded them that if they fail to adopt the relevant laws in the near future, the **EU may impose on them sanctions,** which can result in a financial penalty.

The Directive will delight particularly the television companies because thanks to it, they **will get easier access to financing from advertisement sales.**

While in the United States the advertising practices, such as **product placement (paid placement of real brands and products into the story of movies or series),** have been quite common from the end of the 1990s, this method of advertising has not been allowed by the European Union until recently.

This will change thanks to the amended Audiovisual Media Services Directive. **It will be possible to use product placement in all programmes except** news, documentaries and children’s programmes, but the manufacturer has to notify the viewers at the beginning and

end of the programme as well as after the end of the advertising break by which the programme will be interrupted.

The Directive also changes **the rules for the broadcasting of commercials.** The maximum duration of advertising messages remained at the level of 12 minutes per hour, but the minimum period during which the television cannot interrupt the programme by commercials was reduced. While until now, the television was not allowed to insert a commercial into the programme sooner than after 45 minutes, it will be possible already after half an hour according to the new rules.

The new measures, which will provide the broadcasters with new revenues, **will include the newly permitted split screen advertising,** which is a technique that makes it possible to broadcast advertising during the end credits.

According to the EU, the change in legislation was necessitated by the development of audiovisual technologies. In addition to the classic television broadcasting, the Directive newly regulates also **other forms of delivery of audiovisual content,** such as video on-demand (a service through which the viewers may watch their programmes on the Internet), or watching videos via mobile phones. As regards advertising, the same rules should apply as for classic television broadcasting.

http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1983

REGIONAL POLICY

The Drawing of Subsidies from the EU Funds Accelerates in the CR

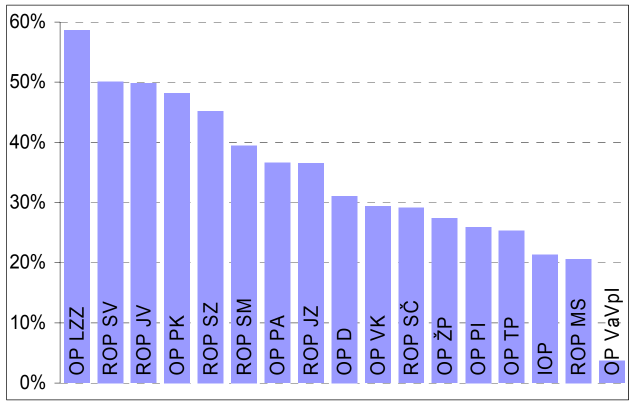
The rate of the drawing on the EU funds is accelerating. In November, the Czechs obtained additional CZK 9.7 billion from the EU funds. Overall, the paid funds for Czech beneficiaries reached CZK 56.2 billion.

The National Coordination Authority (NOK) **expects in the near future a further increase in paid funds** of about CZK 25 billion, particularly for Operational Programme Transport (OP Transport). These paid funds will be reflected in the final amount after accounting in the monitoring system.

The current October-November month-on-month increase is contributed most of all by **Operational Programme Transport** (about CZK 3.6 billion), **OP Environment** (about CZK 2 billion) and **OP Human Resources and Employment** (about CZK 0.8 billion).

While in October, the amount of money paid to Czech beneficiaries was CZK 46.4 billion, the amount of money increased to CZK 56.2 billion by the end of November. In view of the volume of financial allocation, most of the subsidies – almost three fifths – **were approved in Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment.**

Volume of approved subsidies to total allocation



Source: www.strukturalni-fondy.cz, as of 3.12.2009

"The current accelerating trend in drawing would ensure a problem-free use of all the money from the EU funds, which is available to the CR in the programme period 2007–2013," said **Minister for Regional Development Rostislav Vondruška.**

For the 2007–2013 programme period, the Czech Republic can use from the EU funds **up to EUR 26.7 billion** (about CZK 800 billion).

At first glance, the acceleration of the drawing on the EU funds is undoubtedly a good result, but still we should remember that we are only at the end of the first third of the ice hockey match. **Due to the N+2 rule, the overall result will be known not until 2015,** by which year the money from this period can be drawn.

However, the amount of the subsidies drawn **says nothing about their effectiveness,** that is about how meaningful are the projects for which they are spent. **The recently published list of all beneficiaries of the subsidies from the EU funds in the CR is useful** for the improvement of transparency in this area:

http://www.strukturalni-fondy.cz/Stav-cerpani/Seznamy-prijemcu/Akrualni-seznam-prijemcu

It will be possible, however, to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the utilization of the potential of EU subsidies in the Czech Republic **only after a few years.**

http://www.mmr.cz/Pro-media/Tiskove-zpravy/2009/Objem-vycerpanych-penez-z-fondu-EU-stoupl-mezimesi

Two Czech cities – Plzeň and Ostrava – were selected to the short list of candidate cities for the granting of the status of the European Capital of Culture 2015. The European Parliament adopted the common European budget for 2010, which provides for expenditure on payment of EUR 122.9 billion, or 1.04% of EU gross national income. The statistics of the Europe's largest airports confirmed the first place for the British London Heathrow Airport while the Prague Ruzyně Airport occupied the 27th place.

DECEMBER 1

Extension of parental leave: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=421&lang=en

Promotion of EU agricultural products outside the EU: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1849

Visa free travel for citizens of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia before Christmas: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1852

DECEMBER 2

Justice and Home Affairs Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/jha/111649.pdf

The Lisbon Treaty has entered into force: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=422&lang=en

DECEMBER 3

Statistics: Air passenger transport up by 0.6% in 2008: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/7-04122009-AP/EN/7-04122009-AP-EN.PDF

Top airports in the EU27 in terms of total passengers handled in 2008

1. Heathrow/Lond.(UK)	66.91	11. Dublin (IE)	23.38
2. Ch.de Gaulle/Par.(FR)	60.50	12. Palma de Mall.(ES)	22.81
3. Frankfurt/Main (DE)	53.19	13. Stansted/Lon.(UK)	22.34
4. Barajas/Madrid (ES)	50.37	14. Køben. (DK)	21.69
5. Schiphol/Amst. (NL)	47.40	15. Manchester (UK)	21.06
6. Fiumicino/Roma (IT)	34.82	16. Wien (AT)	19.69
7. München (DE)	34.40	17. Milano (IT)	19.01
8. Gatwick/Lond. (UK)	34.16	18. Bruxelles (BE)	18.37
9. Barcelona (ES)	30.36	19. Stockholm (SE)	18.13
10. Orly/Paris (FR)	26.19	20. Düsseldorf (DE)	18.10

Source: Eurostat; airport Prague/Ruzyne with 12,59 mil. handled passengers reached 27th position

Research: EU project to protect and preserve languages: http://ec.europa.eu/research/headlines/index_en.cfm

Economic and Financial Affairs Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ecofin/111706.pdf

DECEMBER 4

Competitiveness Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/intm/111732.pdf

DECEMBER 7

EIB supports with EUR 825 million the development of transport infrastructure in Poland: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=BEI/09/243

New road transport rules will lead to fairer competition and less red tape: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1877

DECEMBER 8

Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/trans/111791.pdf

Energy efficiency: binding rules and smarter choices: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=427&lang=en

Commission launches on-line vote for the new EU Organic Logo: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1883

Scoreboard shows strong increase of aid in response to the financial crisis but Single Market intact: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1884

DECEMBER 9

General Affairs Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/111833.pdf

Commission approves Slovak bank support scheme: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1889

Statistics: Internet access and use in 2009 One person in two in the EU27 uses the internet daily: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/09/176

European Investment Bank provides CZK 2 billion for urban infrastructure in Plzen (CR): http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=BEI/09/244

DECEMBER 10

Commission approves over €1,5bn for 15 CCS and off-shore wind projects to support European economic recovery: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1896

EU enlargement as a powerful incentive: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=429&lang=en

DECEMBER 11

Monitoring the duration of working life in the European Union: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=652&furtherNews=yes

Information Society: '.eu' internet domain now available in all EU languages: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1903

Statistics: A statistical portrait of the lifestyle of young people: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-10122009-AP/EN/3-10122009-AP-EN.PDF

DECEMBER14

Ready to help developing countries: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=430&lang=en

Commission takes new decisions on Estonian and Polish national allocation plans for 2008-2012: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1907

DECEMBER 15

Europeans cautiously optimistic about the economy, but remain concerned about unemployment - Autumn 2009 Eurobarometer: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1913

Ex post evaluation of cohesion policy: findings on efficiency of major projects: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/expost2006/wp10_en.htm

DECEMBER 16

Agriculture and Fisheries Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/agricult/111950.pdf

Examples of national measures taken to implement the Small Business Act (SBA): http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/556

Reviving crisis-hit labour markets: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1926

Joint Employment Report 2009: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/09/554

DECEMBER 17

Steering away from animal tests: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=432&lang=en

Rural development: vote on latest modifications of rural development programmes to address new challenges: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1945

Commission accepts Microsoft commitments to give users browser choice: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1941

December 2009 - Monthly Labour Market Monitor: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=657&furtherNews=yes

DECEMBER 18

Parliament adopts EU budget for 2010: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/034-66442-348-12-51-905-20091215IPR66441-14-12-2009-2009-false/default_en.htm

EU and Canada sign Air Transport Agreement: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1963

Iceland and Norway join EU-US Air Transport Agreement: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/1962

DECEMBER 21

Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/trans/111996.pdf

Stronger rights for bus and coach passengers: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusId=433&lang=en

DECEMBER 22

Quarterly report on the euro area - December 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/euro/article16503_en.htm

Statistics: Natural gas and electricity prices for first semester 2009 - Issue number 49/2009: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-QA-09-049/EN/KS-QA-09-049-EN.PDF

http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-QA-09-048/EN/KS-QA-09-048-EN.PDF

DECEMBER 23

Environment Council Meeting: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/envir/112072.pdf

Statistics: More than 9 million persons employed in the hotels and restaurants sector in the EU - Issue number 101/2009: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-09-101/EN/KS-SF-09-101-EN.PDF

EIB statement regarding D1 motorway in Slovak Republic: http://www.eib.org/projects/news/eib-statement-regarding-d1-motorway-in-slovak-republic.htm?lang=en

Meeting of the key EU institutions

11.1.2010	**Brussels, Belgium**	- Agriculture and Fisheries Council
13.-14.1.2010	**San Indefolso, Spain**	- Informal Meeting of Ministers for Europe
14.-17.1.2010	**Sevilla, Spain**	- Informal meeting of Energy and Environment ministers
18.1.2010	**Brussels, Belgium**	- Eurogroup Meeting
18.1.2010	**Brussels, Belgium**	- Agriculture and Fisheries Council
18.-21.1.2010	**Strasbourg, France**	- EP Plenary
19.1.2010	**Brussels, Belgium**	- Council of Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN)
20.-22.1.2010	**Toledo, Spain**	- Informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers (JHA)
25.1.2010	**Brussels, Belgium**	- Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and General Affairs Council (GAC)
27.-29.1.2010	**Barcelona, Spain**	- Informal meeting of Employment Ministers

Public consultation on EU legislation

Topic of the consultation	Organiser	Deadline
The Review of the Financial Conglomerates Directive	DG MARKT	15.1.2010
The Future "EU 2020" Strategy	Commission	15.1.2010
Cross-Border Crisis Management in the Banking Sector	DG MARKT	20.1.2010
The interconnection of business registers	DG ENTR	31.1.2010
Review of the Package Travel Directive	DG SANCO	7.2.2010

The theme of the last issue of our EU News Monthly Journal was focused on the evaluation of the Czech imprint during 2009. The year 2009, however, has brought a number of other outputs, on which the Czech imprint is not so obvious and which may be regarded as important. Let's look at them in the form of a condensed recapitulation and, at the same time, let's also briefly recall by means of certain symbolic issues what we could expect in 2010 in the field of European integration and its developments.

A LOOK BACK AT 2009 AND THE OUTLOOK FOR 2010 IN THE EU

The theme of the last issue of our EU News Monthly Journal was focused on the evaluation of the Czech imprint and the CR's participation in the European integration activities in the course of 2009, which was quite a special year for us. Nevertheless, the year 2009 has brought a number of other outputs, in which the Czech imprint as not so distinct and which may be considered substantial and, at the same time, they may be considered a form of evidence of specific impacts of the decisions made somewhere in the conference halls of the EU institutions. Let's have a look at them in the form of a condensed recapitulation and, at the same time, let's also briefly recall by means of certain symbolic issues what we could expect in 2010 in the field of European integration and its developments.

LOOK BACK AT 2009 IN THE EU

In the case of visible impacts achieved during 2009, the achievements worth mentioning include, for example, the adoption of the rules for international mobile calls and their entry into force, the mobilisation of financial resources for the purposes of research to overcome serious diseases (e.g. Alzheimer's disease), and many other steps in the area of specific practical policy measures that show a direct impact on the lives of people and the environment in which they live, both inside and outside the EU borders.

1. Creating conditions leading to economic recovery

As we have mentioned and described in detail in many places in our contributions in the EU News Monthly Journal during 2009, the EU and its member states proceeded last year to extensive mobilisation of resources, motivated by one goal – to put Europe's economy back on its feet and to protect EU citizens from the impacts of the economic crisis, especially in the field of employment (or rather, to try to alleviate some of the crisis impacts on employment).

EU governments, coordinated by the European Commission, have undertaken extensive stabilisation measures in the banking and financial sector (in countries where the adoption of these measures was absolutely necessary), which – in terms of credibility – was particularly shaken and disconcerted after the collapse of the US investment bank Lehman Brothers in the autumn of 2008. The measures are primarily aimed at restoring confidence in the sector and at protecting people – their savings and jobs.

Under the EU's Economic Recovery Plan (EERP), about 5.5% of EU's GDP in real terms is being pumped into the economy (as against the previously claimed much higher figures, which were primarily intended to calm the situation and, at the same time, to show certain political determination and resolve in dealing with crisis situations) from national budgets and the EU budget. The focus of this Plan is again primarily oriented on jobs, infrastructure and energy efficiency. The EU has also speeded up advance funding under the EU's regional aid schemes, providing an extra EUR 6.25 billion to kick-start the activities having impact on the achievement of local economic growth.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund is providing new opportunities (so far unused by beneficiaries in the Czech Republic) to workers who have lost their jobs. In 2009, some 16,000 workers, in sectors such as the car industry, textiles and construction, got financial aid from it, and the European Commission has approved applications for this purpose worth EUR 60 million.

In the Eurozone and in most EU countries where the Euro is not the legal tender, the interest rates were cut to record levels. The Commission has tabled a package of radical reforms to the financial markets environment, to cut out reckless conduct and behaviour and to ensure that financial institutions are properly supervised and that they focus on the appropriate exercise of their primary mission – to ensure the process of financial mediation between creditors (depositors, investors) and debtors (borrowers).The EU's position has become a guide for implementing similar steps in the wider geographic context, far exceeding the EU territory, and identical or very similar measures have been adopted at the G20 level.

When EU economies outside the euro area – namely Hungary, Latvia and Romania – requested assistance, the EU stepped in with loans in the aggregate amount of EUR 15 billion.

The macroeconomic and fiscal priorities for the second half of 2009 were mainly marked by the beginning of the consolidation of the systems of public finances severely suffering by the crisis and, at the same time, the gradual formation of the strategies of transition from the crisis-oriented parameters of economic policy to the standard instruments and their criteria (exit strategy).

2. Easier and cheaper mobile phone calls across the EU

Starting from the year 2009, the Europeans can use their mobile phones easier and cheaper throughout the EU territory, which is the result of the EU efforts to provide lower costs and simpler phone connection.

Since July 2009, Europeans using their mobile phones while travelling in another EU country have been paying less for SMS texting. These changes are the result of the introduction of new rules the use of which is expected to cut the roaming bills of holidaymakers and business travellers by about 60%. Sending a text message from abroad in the EU now costs a maximum of EUR 0.11, which is almost three times cheaper in comparison with the previous EU average.

Calls are even cheaper than before and the per-second billing procedure leads to financial savings as subscribers now only pay for the actual length of each call. Today, making a roamed call in another EU country must not cost more than EUR 0.43 per minute and no more than EUR 0.19 to receive a call.

Surfing the web, legal downloading of movies or sending photos with mobile phones can now be done without fear of “bill shocks” while roaming, thanks to cut-off limits to be fully available to consumers (users) from 1 March 2010.

3. Pooling resources to fight dementia

Everyone gets sick sometimes. The EU is backing medical research in many priority areas.

There are still more illnesses than successful practices for their treatment – as the growing problem of occurrence of conditions like Alzheimer's disease cruelly demonstrates. Researchers are still striving to identify many of the processes that generate diseases, so that new treatment procedures can be developed.

To sharpen the focus of research in Europe, the EU has created a novel special programme to increase the chances of finding and discovering new medical procedures and treatments. Based on this “Innovative Medicines Initiative”, as much as EUR 2 billion should be allocated to bring together industry and academia in specific projects designed to remove the bottlenecks that often slow down the transition from new science and scientific knowledge to new medical procedures, treatments and medicines.

The EU is also coordinating work focused on prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care. It has been supporting research into viral diseases. Project proposals on influenza will generate more insight into the modes of its transmission and surveillance and will make it possible to develop novel therapeutics, including for influenza H1N1.

In July 2009, the European Commission took new steps regarding treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia – which currently claim more than seven million victims throughout the EU – and which are likely to affect twice that number over the next 20 years. The Commission is also promoting the pooling of national resources through joint programming of medical research investments. Since 2002, the EU has put almost EUR 175 million into research on the brain and aging.

4. Throwing a new light on climatic change

Everyone can help protect our planet – and save money at the same time. The EU has made it possible to prevent some 32 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions at the flick of a light switch. As from September 2009, the old energy-hungry light bulbs have been replaced by better alternatives that last longer and use less power.

New rules introduced during 2009 are now improving the energy efficiency of household lamps and lighting used in offices, streets and industrial plants. By 2020, this will save roughly the current annual power consumption in Belgium, or the equivalent of 23 million European households enjoying power without using any energy at all.

By the end of 2012, the old incandescent light bulbs will be a thing of the past, while new eco-design rules will improve the energy efficiency of everyday devices and appliances, including TV sets, refrigerators and freezers. The measures adopted so far should save more than 12% of total electricity used in the EU every year by 2020 – more than

the combined annual electricity consumption of households in France and Germany.

These regulations are a practical example of how the EU is leading the way in fighting climate change. It means the emissions that harm the planet will be cut, while every year, Europe will save about EUR 50 billion that can be re-injected into its economy.

5. Fighting hunger in the world's poorest countries

As its EUR 1 billion Food Facility clearly showed in 2009, the EU looks outwards as well as inwards in its concern for bettering people's lives, by implementing measures to combat poverty and hunger across the globe.

The EU prevents more than a billion people in Africa, Asia and Latin America from going hungry. In 2009, the EU Food Facility worth EUR 1 billion provided rapid and massive support to small-scale farmers to boost agricultural production in 50 countries where the population is struggling with worsening food insecurity caused by high food prices and the economic crisis.

The EU helps purchase fertilizers and seeds, provide safety nets and systems for the most vulnerable and microcredit to local farmers, improve transport in rural areas, and provide the necessary professional training. It provides nearly 60% of global development aid, making it the world's biggest donor.

In Zimbabwe, for instance, 176,000 farmers received seeds and fertilizers, which could help double traditional food production in the country. In Bangladesh, a project was supported to generate employment opportunities for 78,000 vulnerable agricultural households – just two examples of how the EU helped food supply in developing countries.

The European Commission has also put food security in the heart of its development assistance. It will contribute around EUR 3 billion within the initiative on global food security agreed at the G8 summit of world leaders in 2009.

6. Protecting animals on land and in the oceans

The EU acts in countless ways to help its citizens, but animal welfare remains an important concern as well.

Commercial seal hunting has few friends in Europe, and during the year 2009, legislation was passed to limit the sale of seal products. The EU cannot ban seal hunting, but it has now decided to make it illegal to put seal products on the market.

The same concern for animals in the wild led the European Commission to propose an action plan to protect sharks. Overfishing of many shark species is pushing them to the verge of extinction. The current catch by EU vessels of sharks and related species now runs at around 100,000 tonnes each year. So the EU is aiming to reduce catches of deep-sea sharks to zero by 2010, and to promote sustainable policies that will ensure the survival of all species of sharks and of the fishing communities that depend on them.

Even in the more domestic sphere of food production, the EU has acted in 2009 to improve welfare, with new rules on improving conditions for animals at the time of slaughter and ensuring that this is carried out humanely.

7. Caring for the environment: from pesticides to petrol

To keep the environment as clean as possible, the EU has brought in new rules to cut down on harmful pollutants from petrol or pesticides.

Every time you fill your car with fuel, some particles escape into the atmosphere. The benzene in the vaporized fuel can cause cancer and it also contributes to the formation of ground-level ozone – better known as smog – which is one of the air pollutants most damaging to people and the environment. In 2009, the EU adopted legislation obliging petrol stations to introduce systems that will capture and recycle these harmful emissions.

With the same objective of keeping Europe's environment clean, the EU also brought in new rules to make sure that when farmers use pesticides to boost crop yields, they are extremely careful and cause no harm to human health, wildlife and the environment. Europeans share in a relatively high concentration (a relatively large number at a small place) valuable natural resources like water, air and soil, so their protection needs to be coordinated and Europe-wide.

The new pesticide rules require their sustainable use and limit such use of them that can lead to accidents and damage with devastating impact on the environment. The operations that are prohibited include, for example, unsafe or hazardous handling, their use in improper or faulty equipment, or unnecessary aerial crop spraying, which results in uncontrolled spreading into the surrounding space. The legislation also shifts the focus away from chemicals and towards integrated systems of pest management, in which plant protection strategies are designed to promote natural control mechanisms.

8. Keeping online shopping hassle-free

The Internet has helped many retailers widen their reach and operational range, which is certainly a good thing, provided the citizen and the customer get a fair deal too.

An investigation of the competent EU institutions into websites selling electronic goods like digital cameras and mobile phones found that more than half of them were not giving customers the rights they are entitled to under EU legislation. The survey also revealed the existence of misleading or even false information on websites regarding the total acquisition cost of the offered product or service, or incomplete contact details of the selling trader.

The investigation included 200 of the biggest websites in the EU selling personal music players, DVD players, computer equipment, game consoles and other electronic goods. As a result, the competent national authorities are now enforcing improvements.

Similar practices were also found in the case of websites selling airline tickets – mainly distorted and misleading information on prices and transport conditions, or using unfair trading practices. Visible remedy has been achieved very quickly in this area and the current situation is much more satisfactory.

9. Rebuilding Europe when natural disaster strikes

Solidarity is one of the core values on which the project of the European Union is built and during 2009, the EU countries had the opportunity to act very rapidly and flexibly to support one another, by sending aid to areas affected by natural disasters in the form of financial, in-kind and human assistance.

The Abruzzo earthquake in April 2009 in Italy sent physical shockwaves across Italy and emotional shockwaves across Europe. The plight of the victims and the clear need for emergency relief provoked an immediate response. In addition to the dead and injured, thousands of people were made homeless. The disaster has also virtually brought the regional economy to a standstill.

The objective to reconstruct this area in the shortest possible time is now the logical result of the situation, and in this context, the EU is planning to grant nearly half a billion euros to Italy to help cope with the aftermath. Financial support has come from the EU Solidarity Fund (created in 2002 to settle the consequences of extensive floods especially in the Central European territory, including the Czech Republic).The Abruzzo earthquake is the greatest and most serious disaster for which the fund's help has been sought since it was set up. The money helped to provide temporary housing, to repair power stations, water networks and roads, and to clean rubble and devastated villages.

Other financial assistance is revitalising the economy by helping smaller companies, renovating public buildings and promoting tourism. It is also funding the resumption of activities by sporting and cultural associations with the aim of encouraging the 27,000 local students to stay in the area rather than choose to spend their student time in other regions of Italy. Their presence is an important economic factor for the development of the region.

10. Giving bank customers value for money

The EU created the single market for the benefit of citizens as well as companies. Now the EU institutions are making sure that and whether the banks and financial institutions, which are subject to statutory regulation rules, give their customers a fair deal.

Where banks appear to be overcharging for their retail services, the EU competent authorities have moved in to monitor and investigate the causes of such situation – and, where necessary, to demand better treatment for customers. And where services are of inadequate poor quality, the EU has insisted on improvements.

A European Commission study of retail financial services revealed problems with the way banks inform and advise their customers. Even the experts compiling the report found bank fees so unclear that they needed additional contacts with the bank to find the real costs of account maintenance and administration.

The EU legislation that came into force during 2009 will entitle credit card customers to seek full refunds when they find out that they have been overcharged. Banks will have to reply within 10 days of receiving a complaint.

The EU is working towards a target state allowing consumers, companies, merchants and public administrations to make payments under the same conditions throughout the EU – under a regime of procedures and rules that would be as easy as within their own country.

The above-mentioned survey presented an extract of 10 selected areas, to which the European integration activities in the year 2009 brought evident and tangible benefit. However, the process of creating the environment and content of a real European Union has by far not ended with the year 2009 and another contribution to the achievement of the target vision can be expected in 2010. What regular

and in a sort of ways symbolic events are awaiting us this year?

OUTLOOK FOR 2010 IN THE EU

2010: European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

As every year since 1983, also the just started year 2010 is dedicated in the perception of the EU institutions to one specific theme. This time it is “2010: European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion”.

Combating poverty and social exclusion ranks among the main objectives of the EU and its member states.

In March 2000, at the launching of the Lisbon strategy, the Heads of States and Governments of the EU pledged themselves to making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by the year 2010. Despite the efforts deployed, a significant proportion of the European population still lives in destitution and has limited or no access to basic services such as health care.

This state of affairs conflicts with the EU’s common values of solidarity and social justice.

Some facts documenting the urgency of combating poverty and social exclusion

Our social protection systems are among the most highly-developed in the world and yet, today, too many Europeans still live in poverty, which takes various forms:

- 79 million people live below the poverty line (set at 60% of their country’s median income);
- One European in tens live in a household where none of its members works;
- For 8% of Europeans, having a job is not enough to work one’s way out of poverty;
- 19% of children live under the threat of poverty, 19 million children are affected by poverty; as regards age structure, children are more exposed to this scourge than the rest of the population.

Why the 2010 Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion? Poverty and social exclusion not only prevent the improvement of the life situation of individuals, but also hamper their ability to take an active part in the life of modern society, and they also impair economic development.

The EU wishes to reaffirm the importance of collective responsibility in combating poverty. This is undoubtedly binding on the key decision makers, but it also calls for a response from the actors in the public and private sectors. Among its aims, the European Year 2010 will seek to give a voice to those who daily experience poverty and social exclusion.

Four cross-disciplinary objectives were set for the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion:

- Recognition: recognize the fundamental right of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to take an active part in society;
- Shared responsibility and participation: promote public support for social inclusion policies, emphasising collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion, and fostering commitment by all key public and private actors;
  Cohesion: promote a more cohesive society, where no one doubts that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty and social inequality;
- Commitment and practical action: renew the pledge of the EU and its member states to combat poverty and social exclusion.

To achieve these objectives, the 2010 European Year has been given a budget of at least 26 million euros, of which 17 million euros is contributed from the EU budget (the rest is provided by funding from national public and private financial sources).

Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

The importance of the Spanish Presidency consists, among others, in the fact that Spain has become the first country to take over the rotating presidency (for the period of 1 January to 30 June 2010) in accordance with the newly effective Lisbon Treaty (under the conditions of the newly established posts of the permanent European Council President and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy).

The Spanish Presidency is currently conducted in close coordination with the two following presidency countries – Belgium (in the second half of this year) and Hungary (in the first half of next year) – with whom it forms the so-called “trio of Presidencies” (the published joint logo symbolizes their close partnership, which should be also declared by the high level of consistency of the content of the pursued agenda).

From the beginning, Spain will likely contend with the fact that the eagerly-awaited climate change conference in Copenhagen in December 2009 ended in a so far non-binding stalemate, and the need for a satisfactory resolution of this most important issue is likely to lead to a

continuation in the discussion of this issue under the baton of Spain.

Spain, whose economy belongs to those severely affected by the economic crisis – particularly in the form of a record rise in unemployment, is very heavily focused on the continuation of activities supporting the process of gradual reviving the European economy from the recession.

Economic topics will also focus on the updating of the process of the Lisbon Strategy and in particular on the budget proposals for the EU financial perspective after 2013.

Important milestones, which should be fulfilled by the Spanish Presidency or which would affect its performance:

18 January	Presentation of Spain's EU presidency's priorities in the European Parliament (EP)
11-19 January	Hearing of nominated European Commissioners in the EP
21 January	Start of "European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion"
26 January	Voting in EP about the new European Commission
11 February	Extraordinary European Council about economic situation in the EU
March	Spring's European Council (major topic: post Lisbon strategy)
5-6 March	Informal Council of the EU on Foreign Affairs
8 March	EU – Morocco Summit
10 April	EU – Pakistan Summit
14 May	EU – Mexico Summit
June	European Council
5-6 June	EU – Egypt Summit
7 July	Mediterranean Summit

The Spanish Presidency is based on four priority areas:

- Economy, its recovery from the economic crisis and the creation of new jobs;
- Implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon;
- Development of policies focused on citizens' welfare, with priority focus on gender equality;
- Foreign affairs; efforts to help make the EU a real global player.

In addition to these supreme level priorities, the Spanish Presidency works with additional four major priority areas:

- Strengthening the European area of freedom, security and justice, with special emphasis on the fight against terrorism and revaluation of the immigration and asylum policies of the EU;
- Reinforcement of EU policies towards the so-called "ultra-peripheral" regions, including Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Reunion, the Azores, the Canary Islands, and Madeira;
- Promotion of a new low-carbon energy model applied in the light of the ongoing trend of climate changes;
- Defining the conditions and parameters of the next long-term budget planning period of the EU for the years 2014 – 2020.

European Capital of Culture 2010

With the entry into the New Year 2010, we have also witnessed the changing of the honorary title of the "European Capital of Culture". The cities of Linz in Austria and Vilnius in Lithuania have been replaced for 2010 by a new set – the German industrial city of Essen and the adjacent locality of the equally industrial Ruhr District, the historic Hungarian city of Pécs, and the pearl of the Euro-Asian border, the Turkish city of Istanbul. This year's selection of European capitals of culture carries the sign of music, theatre, dance, film and literature and a rich variety of events for local citizens and visitors is ready and available in all three of them.

Ombudsman

The last year's elections to the European Parliament and the ongoing procedure of the appointment of the new members of the European Commission have somewhat overshadowed another important personnel matter. On 19 January 2010, the European Parliament should elect a new European ombudsman.

Economy

The above-mentioned list of events that we will encounter in the course of this year, is either targeted at the year 2010 or represents one-off matters relating to this year (besides the ombudsman, for instance, the hearing and then the immediate start-up of the operation of the new membership structure of the European Commission.

However, if we view the year 2010 through the lens of its factual content rather than the one-off events, the most important theme of the year for the implementation of the EU policies will most likely be the economy. Accordingly, we will pay specific attention to economy at this point in the next issue of the EU News Monthly Journal.

The list of prominent personalities, who made an enormous contribution to the establishment of the modern integration process in Europe in the middle of last century, should definitely include the Belgian politician Paul-Henri Spaak. This Belgian Socialist politician of pan-European importance was, inter alia, three times the Prime Minister of Belgium, the first President of the European Parliament, the first President of the UN General Assembly and the Secretary General of NATO.

PAUL-HENRI SPAAK (BELGIUM)

The list of prominent personalities, who made an enormous contribution to the establishment of the modern integration process in Europe in the middle of last century, should definitely include the Belgian politician Paul-Henri Spaak. This convinced socialist was born in 1899 in Schaerbeek, the suburbs of Brussels, now fully incorporated into the Belgian capital. He comes from a family in which political career has already had some tradition. Interestingly, his mother Marie Janson was the first woman to become a member of the Belgian Senate.

Before starting his own political career, Spaak concealed his very young age to be accepted to the army and participate in World War I, during which he was arrested and spent two years in German prison.

In 1920, he joined the Socialist Belgian Labour Party and in 1932, as a lawyer graduated from the Free University of Brussels, Spaak became a Member of the Belgian Parliament. In the mid-1930s he entered the government, first as Minister of Transport, and later he became Minister of Foreign Affairs (and then again several times), which was a post that complied better with his nature. Before the outbreak of World War II, Spaak held the post of Belgian Prime Minister for less than a year (and returned to the post after the war). He spent the war in exile in London (working closely with Jean Monnet) and communicated with Winston Churchill, who became his political model.

It was during his stay in London that he became confirmed in his ideas about the necessity of a new arrangement in Europe, which would offer stronger guarantees of peace and development. In 1944, he took an active part in the creation of the Benelux organisation and subsequently in numerous activities within the international institutional arrangement.

He became the first President of the General Assembly of the UN in 1946, and then also held high positions in the recently established Council of Europe, in the founding of which he was involved. In 1952, he de facto became the first President of the predecessor of the European Parliament – the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community. At the turn of the 1940th and 1950s, he became the Secretary General of NATO, a post to which he returned ten years later.

Worth mentioning is also his role as President of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC, predecessor of today's OECD), whose main mission was to coordinate and allocate the US economic aid to the war-ravaged Europe's economy under the Marshall Plan.

Perhaps Spaak’s most important activity was, however, his indispensable role in creating a common European market and the subsequent establishing of the European Economic Community. He was appointed chairman of the committee of the Messina Conference in 1955, which laid the foundations of economic integration in Europe. Its output – the Spaak Report – constituted the basic material for the subsequently signed Treaties of Rome establishing the EEC and Euratom. These activities earned Spaak a place among the founding fathers of the European Union. In 1957, he was awarded the Charlemagne Award.

The 1960s represented a kind of political disappointment to him and therefore, he retired in 1966 and resigned all his public posts to spend his last years in the Brussels suburb of Braine-l´Alleud, where the died on 31 July 1972.

The statistical window in a tabular form shows important macroeconomic indicators from all member states and the EU as a whole. It includes economic performance indicators (per capita GDP as compared to the EU average, GDP growth, unemployment rate), external economic stability indicators (current account to GDP), fiscal stability indicators (public budget to GDP, public debt to GDP), and pricing indicators (annual inflation based on HICP, base price level).

Key macroeconomic indicators

	GDP growth y-on-y			Current account to GDP*			Unemployment rate			Inflation y-on-y average		
in %	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	VIII-09	IX-09	X-09	VIII-09	IX-09	X-09
Belgium	2.8	2.9	1.0	2.0	2.2	-2.5	8.0	8.0	8.0	-0.7	-1.0	-0.9
Bulgaria	6.3	6.2	6.0	-18.4	-25.2	-25.4	7.0	7.2	7.5	1.3	0.2	0.3
CR	6.8	6.1	2.5	-2.4	-3.2	-3.1	7.3	7.5	7.7	0.0	-0.3	-0.6
Denmark	3.3	1.6	-1.2	3.0	1.5	2.2	6.0	6.5	6.9	0.7	0.5	0.6
Germany	3.2	2.5	1.3	6.5	7.9	6.6	7.7	7.6	7.6	-0.1	-0.5	-0.1
Estonia	10.0	7.2	-3.6	-16.9	-17.8	-9.4	15.2	15.2	na	-0.7	-1.7	-2.1
Ireland	5.4	6.0	-3.0	-3.6	-5.3	-5.2	12.1	12.4	12.5	-2.4	-3.0	-2.8
Greece	4.5	4.5	2.0	-11.2	-14.3	-14.6	9.7	9.7	na	1.0	0.7	1.2
Spain	4.0	3.6	0.9	-9.0	-10.0	-9.6	18.7	19.1	19.3	-0.8	-1.0	-0.6
France	2.2	2.3	0.4	-0.5	-1.0	-2.3	9.6	9.7	9.9	-0.2	-0.4	-0.2
Italy	2.0	1.6	-1.0	-2.6	-2.4	-3.4	7.7	8.0	8.2	0.1	0.4	0.3
Cyprus	4.1	4.4	3.7	-6.9	-11.9	-17.8	5.7	5.9	6.1	-0.9	-1.2	-1.0
Latvia	12.2	10.0	-4.6	-22.5	-22.3	-13.0	18.9	20.1	21.3	1.5	0.1	-1.2
Lithuania	7.8	9.8	2.8	-10.6	-14.5	-11.7	14.6	14.6	na	2.2	2.3	1.0
Luxembourg	5.6	6.5	0.0	10.3	9.7	5.5	5.9	5.9	6.0	-0.2	-0.4	-0.2
Hungary	4.0	1.0	0.6	-7.5	-6.8	-7.1	10.5	10.7	10.8	5.0	4.8	4.2
Malta	3.8	3.7	2.1	-9.2	-6.1	-5.6	7.1	7.1	6.9	1.0	0.8	-0.5
Netherlands	3.4	3.6	2.0	9.3	8.7	4.8	3.6	3.7	3.8	-0.1	0.0	0.4
Austria	3.5	3.5	2.0	2.8	3.6	3.2	5.2	5.5	5.6	0.2	0.0	0.1
Poland	6.2	6.8	5.0	-2.7	-4.7	-5.1	8.4	8.5	8.7	4.3	4.0	3.8
Portugal	1.4	1.9	0.0	-10.0	-9.4	-12.1	9.9	10.1	10.2	-1.2	-1.8	-1.6
Romania	7.9	6.3	6.2	-10.5	-13.4	-12.2	7.2	7.2	na	4.9	4.9	4.3
Slovenia	5.8	6.8	3.5	-2.5	-4.8	-6.2	6.4	6.5	6.8	0.1	0.0	0.2
Slovakia	8.5	10.4	6.4	-8.2	-5.7	-6.6	12.6	13.0	13.4	0.5	0.0	-0.1
Finland	4.9	4.2	1.0	4.5	4.2	3.0	8.6	8.7	8.8	1.3	1.1	0.6
Sweden	4.2	2.6	-0.2	8.4	8.8	6.3	8.6	8.7	8.8	1.9	1.4	1.8
UK	2.9	2.6	0.6	-3.3	-2.7	-1.6	7.8	7.9	na	1.6	1.1	1.5
EU	3.1	2.9	0.9	-1.3	-1.1	-2.0	9.2	9.3	9.4	0.6	0.3	0.5

	Public budget to GDP*			Public debt to GDP			GDP per capita to Ø EU			Price level to Ø EU		
in %	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008	2006	2007	2008
Belgium	0.3	-0.2	-1.2	88.1	84.2	89.8	118.4	118.1	113.9	106.7	106.3	110.7
Bulgaria	3.0	0.1	1.8	22.7	18.2	14.1	36.5	37.5	40.2	44.6	46.5	51.0
CR	-2.6	-0.7	-2.1	29.4	29.0	30.0	77.6	80.3	80.1	61.4	62.4	72.4
Denmark	5.2	4.5	3.4	31.3	26.8	33.5	122.9	120.1	118.4	138.4	137.7	141.0
Germany	-1.6	0.2	0.0	67.6	65.0	65.9	115.9	115.1	116.1	103.0	103.1	103.9
Estonia	2.3	2.6	-2.7	4.5	3.8	4.6	65.9	69.5	68.2	67.4	71.5	76.7
Ireland	3.0	0.3	-7.2	25.0	25.1	44.1	146.9	149.6	136.6	124.0	124.5	126.9
Greece	-2.9	-3.7	-7.7	97.1	95.6	99.2	92.9	94.2	93.9	88.8	89.4	94.1
Spain	2.0	1.9	-4.1	39.6	36.1	39.7	104.2	105.7	103.4	91.8	92.4	95.7
France	-2.3	-2.7	-3.4	63.7	63.8	67.4	109.0	108.9	107.4	108.8	108.3	111.1
Italy	-3.3	-1.5	-2.7	106.5	103.5	105.8	103.8	101.9	100.5	104.3	103.9	105.3
Cyprus	-1.2	3.4	0.9	64.6	58.3	48.4	90.2	90.8	94.7	90.5	88.8	89.6
Latvia	-0.5	-0.3	-4.1	10.7	9.0	19.5	52.5	57.9	55.8	60.5	65.9	74.7
Lithuania	-0.4	-1.0	-3.2	18.0	16.9	15.6	55.5	59.8	61.1	57.1	59.6	66.8
Luxembourg	1.3	3.7	2.5	6.6	6.6	13.5	268.7	275.1	271.4	111.8	112.4	116.2
Hungary	-9.3	-5.0	-3.8	65.6	65.9	72.9	63.5	62.6	62.8	60.3	66.1	69.7
Malta	-2.6	-2.2	-4.7	63.6	62.0	63.8	76.7	77.5	75.5	74.5	73.3	78.4
Netherlands	0.5	0.2	0.7	47.4	45.5	58.2	130.9	131.3	135.0	104.1	103.4	103.4
Austria	-1.6	-0.6	-0.4	62.2	59.5	62.6	123.7	123.9	123.1	102.0	101.4	104.6
Poland	-3.6	-1.9	-3.6	47.7	45.0	47.2	52.3	53.8	57.6	62.1	63.7	68.6
Portugal	-3.9	-2.6	-2.7	64.7	63.6	66.3	76.3	76.1	75.5	84.9	84.6	86.7
Romania	-2.2	-2.5	-5.5	12.4	12.6	13.6	38.3	42.5	45.8	57.1	61.5	62.1
Slovenia	-1.3	0.0	-1.8	26.7	23.3	22.5	87.8	89.5	90.7	76.8	77.8	83.0
Slovakia	-3.5	-1.9	-2.3	30.5	29.3	27.7	63.5	67.0	71.9	57.4	63.5	69.5
Finland	4.0	5.2	4.5	39.3	35.2	34.1	114.8	115.8	115.1	122.6	122.5	124.6
Sweden	2.5	3.8	2.5	45.9	40.5	38.0	121.4	122.3	121.5	118.5	117.3	114.4
UK	-2.7	-2.7	-5.5	43.2	44.2	52.0	120.7	118.5	117.2	110.3	110.3	99.4
EU	-1.4	-0.8	-2.3	61.3	58.7	61.5	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Source: Eurostat, *) net balance, GDP per capita according to PPP*