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U.S. Embassy Prague Press Review

Monday, May 19, 2014

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AT A GLANCE:

U.S. & International Affairs

- *Lower House to create team tasked with defense budget increase*
- *HN warns about simplistic explanations and solutions in Ukraine*
- *LN comments "Hiring U.S. mercenaries would be a serious blunder for the Ukrainian junta"*
- *Pravo comments on alleged business activities of VP Biden's son in Ukraine: "Nothing new"*
- *E15: EU common energy policy remains utopia*
- *LN argues that multispeed internet would distance Europe from America*

Domestic News

- *Poll before EU elections: TOP 09 beats CSSD*
- *Internet poll: Czechs are afraid of Islam*
- *CR extends Gripen fighter planes lease until 2027*

U.S. & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Lower Chamber to Set Up Committee Tasked with Defense Budget Increase

Lidove Noviny (05/17, p. 3): The Lower Chamber created a team of MPs and external experts led by former Chief of General Staff Jiri Sedivy, whose job is to draft a declaration guaranteeing a gradual increase of the defense budget. The current Czech defense budget is just over 1% of CR's GDP, but according to the declaration, it is supposed to increase to 1.2 – 1.3% next year and reach 2% by 2025. "The main reason of the declaration is to send a signal to our NATO partners," noted the daily. According to former Defense Minister Alexandr Vondra, "the Czech Republic was not criticized [for its low defense budget] in the past because it had many soldiers in Afghanistan, and also there was the financial crisis. Now, the situation has changed," Vondra remarked. The Lower House Defense Committee would also like to oversee in the future all military procurements over 50 million crowns [about 2.5 million dollars], and the first step was establishing this past week of the Subcommittee for Czech defense acquisitions and innovations.

"The Ukrainian Conflict Is Not a Clear Fight between Good and Evil"

Ondrej Soukup wrote in Hospodarske Noviny (05/19, p.9): "World media abound in commentaries on what is currently happening in East Ukraine ... without the commentators ever setting foot in Ukraine. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that most of the assertions, either from the Western or Russian media, don't stand the test of reality by those who actually travel around the region and speak to the locals -- only very few Ukrainians support constitutional changes made by Kalashnikovs in the streets. ... Nevertheless, there are those who want to do just that. Besides hardcore nationalists on both sides of the conflict, there are ... people who are taking advantage of the situation for their own interests. Corrupt oligarchs are fighting for power (e.g. Ihor Kolomyjskii, the Dnepropetrovsk governor, oligarch and head of the local Jewish community is said to be financing the local militia) while degenerate state administration structures are replaced by militants with dubious credibility. The most important thing these days is not to fall into the trap of easy explanations and solutions."

"Where Are Mercenaries in Ukraine From?"

Jan Schneider opined in Lidove Noviny (05/17, p. 16): "If the Ukrainian government really hired U.S. mercenaries to fight pro-Russian separatists in the country's eastern regions, which is quite likely, it would confirm all allegations about the West's logistic support to events in Kiev's Maidan. It would also be a serious blunder, similar to Czech Defense Minister Stropnický's mistake when he talked about sensitiveness of stationing NATO troops on Czech territory. For any reasonable nation in the world, stationing—even non-permanent—of foreign troops is an abnormal situation. ... The problem with private security companies like Academi (former Xe Services, which is former Blackwater) is that they are not bound by any laws, rules, human rights standards, or international control. No wonder these firms get usually hired by various junta regimes, which don't hesitate to use them against their own people. The current Ukrainian regime is also a junta, because its representatives call pro-Russian separatists 'terrorists' only because they want to vote about their independence."

"Business as Usual"

Alexandr Mitrofanov commented in Pravo (05/17, p. 6) that personal economic interest of former or even current Western politicians in unstable countries which are in focus of their governments is “business as usual.” ... “For example, the White House refuses to talk about activities of Vice President Biden’s son Hunter in the leadership of Burisma, a Ukrainian natural gas company. The U.S. administration considers it a private matter. Much has been written about economic advantages U.S. officials have allegedly gained from geopolitical changes: Dick Chaney in Iraq and Madeleine Albright in Kosovo, to name just two. But the U.S. is far from being the only country involved in this. The above-mentioned Burisma Company also pays former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, and former German Chancellor Schroeder, for his part, likes to do business with Putin.”

“Putin Uses Advantage of a Divided Europe”

Michal Snobr noted in E15 (05/19, p. 14): “Germany-led Europe has never been more divided over energy issues like it is nowadays. It has not really learned a lesson from the 2009 energy crisis, and it seems not to try to find a solution to its over-dependence on Russian natural gas. Instead of decreasing its dependence, the EU has actually *increased* its dependence on Russian natural gas exports. The Ukrainian crisis has fully revealed that the EU Common Energy Policy remains a utopia.”

“Multispeed Internet Will Distance America from Europe”

Zbynek Petracek wrote in Lidove Noviny (05/17, p.10): “With internet, we have come to rely on two things – it is free and administered by the U.S. (through the ICANN) under U.S. rules. The latest decision of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) on new rules that could allow companies to pay for prioritized internet traffic may, however, mean that America doesn’t offer only freedom of speech but also its business policies. ... If the U.S. permits the creation of fast and slow lanes on the internet where moneybags websites pay to stream data faster than their rivals, it will be a step towards the end of net neutrality. ... While Europe tries to adopt the ‘Finland model’ securing the right to internet access for all people, America follows a different path, the path of free market.”

DOMESTIC NEWS

TOP 09 Beats CSSD – EU Elections Poll

Pravo (05/17, p.7): According to the latest poll conducted by Herzmann and Data Collect, CSSD will be dissatisfied; it was replaced on the second place by TOP 09. Agency director Jan Herzmann commented: “CSSD fell behind already in April. Compared to parliamentary elections last fall, its popularity significantly declined; the party hasn’t used its potential.” The elections will take place this weekend. *See chart below:*

Party	MAY Percent	APRIL Percent

ANO	20.1	22.2
TOP 09	14.2	9.6
CSSD	12.5	14.1
KSCM	12.2	11.1
Usvit/Dawn	7.7	8.9
ODS	7.2	7.6
Greens	4.9	2.9
Strana svobodnych	4.7	4.8
KDU-CSL	4.6	3.8
Pirates	4.3	3.4

Czechs Afraid of Islam – Internet Poll

Hospodarske Noviny (05/19, p.4): Two thirds of those Czechs who used the European election calculator EUvox perceive Islam as a threat to Czech society; the Sociological Institute of Czech Academy of Sciences surveyed from the EUvox responses of 18,000 Czechs. These are mainly supporters Usvit/Dawn, Strana Svobodnych, ODS and partially ANO.

CR Extends Lease of Gripen Jet Fighters

Pravo (05/17, p.3): Representatives of Czech and Swedish Defense Ministries signed an agreement on extending the lease of fourteen Jas-39 Gipeen jet fighters until 2017. The contract for the period from 2015 until 2027, with an option for another two years, will cost CZK 21.4 billion (USD 1.1 billion). The planes will be upgraded and the CR will get more services – it will get new communication systems compactible with NATO, night vision equipment, and staff training.

Nagyova Case: Some Case Players Suspected of Sabotage

MF Dnes 05/19, p.1) The UOOZ anti-corruption police have been investigating ex-State Prosecutor Libor Grygarek and ex-Deputy Interior Minister Michal Moroz for suspicion of sabotage of the constitutional order and defense capacity of the country. They are suspected of obstructing or weakening the fulfillment of important government functions by trying to fill key posts in the police structure in such a way that they had personal gain and covered their own backs. This is connected to the Jana Nagyova-Necasova case. *Full story can be found [here](#).*

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PRINTED MEDIA (September 2013)		Sold Copies	INTERNET MEDIA	Real users/month
MF Dnes	Mainstream daily	185,664	iDnes.cz	1,569,420
Pravo	Center-left daily	103,880	Novinky.cz	3,136,195
Lidove noviny	Center-right daily	38,460	Lidovky.cz	537,347
Hospodarske noviny	Business daily	38,361	iHNed.cz	405,876
Denik	Regional network	163,287	Denik.cz	777,755
Respekt	Respected weekly	33,868	Aktualne.cz	1,117,556
Tyden	News weekly	39,058	Tyden.cz	194,345
Reflex	Weekly magazine	63,074	Figures for September 2013	
Czech Television (CT24.cz)	Public service broadcaster (5 channels)	ČT Group		27.58% share
TV Nova (tn.cz) – CET2	Commercial broadcaster (5 channels)	TV Nova Group		33.36% share
CRo - Czech Radio (rozhlas.cz)	Public service broadcaster (3 national stations, 8 regional , 4 digital/web radios)	CRo Radiozurnal Radio Impuls (priv.)		727,000 listeners/day 1,026,000 listen./day

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