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“Partnership of education and entrepreneurs is the key to competitiveness”, says Minister Liška

Czech Minister for Education, Youth and Sport, **Ondřej Liška** visited Brussels on the 10th and 11th of September 2008 to unveil the Czech Presidency's priorities in the field of education. Liška commented on the future of the European education system, saying, “If Europe is to remain competitive in the next 10 years, close partnerships must be formed between the education sector and employers – especially entrepreneurs.”

During his stay in Brussels, Liška met with members of the European Commission and European Parliament as well as business representatives and other stakeholders to discuss the priorities for education under the Czech Presidency and to get opinions and feedback. CEBRE hosted a Strategic Debate with stakeholders during which Liška stressed the importance of the EU as a platform for the sharing of best practices when it comes to the development of tools that can

create a more competitive Europe. According to **Odile Quintin**, Director General for Education, Youth and Culture (DG EAC), new measures directed at a wider context of education will be presented by the Commission in the near future.

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From left: Pal Schmitt (Hungarian MEP), Jan Březina (Czech MEP), Ondřej Liška (Czech Minister for Education), Helga Trüpel (German MEP) and Jiří Plečičký (Member of Commissioner Verheugen's Cabinet)

SBA: The devil is often hidden in the practice on the ground!



From left: Jiří Plečičký (Member of Commissioner Verheugen's Cabinet), Petr Dolejší (Czech Permanent Representation), Jan Březina (Czech MEP), Andrea Benassi (Secretary General of UEAPME) and Ben Butters (Eurochambres) during the Business Breakfast

The process of implementation of the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA) into European and national framework and the impact of the ongoing financial crises on SMEs were among the topics of discussion at the Business Breakfast organized by CEBRE and the Czech Permanent Representation to the EU on October 8, 2008.

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NEWS FLASH

Recession is not imminent in the Czech Republic

Within the Czech Republic, the current financial crisis is evident in several areas including the decrease in public interest in immovable property and the slowdown of construction and limitation of industrial production for foreign markets. Though the GDP growth will be low, a recession for the Czech economy is not imminent. Moreover, though there will be restructuring and production limitations in certain companies, collective redundancies are also not definite.

We cannot accept the euro

Minister of Finance, Miroslav Kalousek and the Governor of the Czech National Bank, Zdeněk Tůma have stated that the introduction of the euro in 2012 is an unrealistic goal in light of the current economic situation. The financial crisis may also affect the country's ability to comply with the Stability and Growth Pact. The position of entrepreneurs, however, is evident – they want the euro. As it is, the strength of the crown is problematic for exporters, especially in the automotive industry, which is the engine of the economy.

Czech e-government

As of October, entrepreneurs can now be notified of a new trade or its modification through their PC via a free Internet application. To access the application, an online form must be filled out, signed with an electronic signature, and sent to the central registry. The Trade Licence Office will then process the form electronically and send each entrepreneur's information to the Tax Office, the Social Security Administration and the health insurance company.

Czech apprentices at EUROSILLS

46 Czech apprentices represented the Czech Republic at this year's EUROSILLS competition in the Netherlands. EUROSILLS is an all-European competition for future craftsmen aimed at supporting and promoting the prestige of crafts and secondary vocational education around Europe. The World Competition of Young Slaters and Tinsmiths is planned for early November in Prague.

WHAT IS THE KEY TO COMPETITIVENESS?

Partnership is an effective tool for interconnecting three key factors of the knowledge economy – education, research and innovation. Implementation of the partnership is easiest at the local or regional level, but within the framework of the EU, it is possible to create good conditions at the strategic and support levels.

Czech Minister of Education Ondřej Liška plans to do the following:

- Hold an international conference about partnership at the ministerial level in April 2009
- Adopt conclusions of the Council for Education, Youth and Culture on partnership in May 2009
- Include partnership in continuing the strategic “Education and Training 2010” programme
- Reflect partnership also in a basic strategic document – a new Lisbon Strategy - for the years following 2010



A number of interesting partnership projects in which Europe may find inspiration are also available in the Czech Republic. One example is the Czech project “IQ Auto” which supports providing equipment to workshops of secondary vocational schools, offers the schools guest teachers directly from the field and also participates in the creation of educational programmes. Radek Špicar, External Relations Director of Škoda Auto, described the developments this way: “We have founded our own technological centre, a secondary vocational school and a university. But in spite of all that, we must make the best use of conventional structures – the potential of secondary vocational schools.”

TALKING ABOUT PARTNERSHIP...



...BETWEEN EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneurs will soon become the main partners of the Czech Presidency and the European Commission in the area of education. Cooperation between employers and the education sector is the main priority of Czech Minister of Education Ondřej Liška and will be what he promotes during the coming Presidency in the EU Council.

In September, Minister Liška arrived in Brussels to present his plan to the partners and to listen to their opinion and perspectives on the given issue. His plan has been met with great interest and positive acceptance. CEBRE – Czech Business Representation to the EU participated in the preparation of his visit. Support of the partnership is in full compliance with the plans of the European Commission. Towards the end of this year, it will support knowledge transfer into the business sphere and the strengthening of cooperation between universities and entrepreneurs in the area of innovation. The Commissioners responsible for education, employment and enterprise (Figel, Špidla and Verheugen) will present their joint initiative. “We will propose concrete tools,” says Odile Quintin, Director General for Education, “and prove that it is necessary to broaden the context of education.”

Besides the European Commission, a number of other parties, such as the European Parliament, stakeholders and social partners, are involved in the success or failure of the Presidency’s plans. It is particularly these parties with whom Minister Liška discussed his plans and took part in the following events: an informal dinner with the Commissioners, the Directors-General and the leading representatives of BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME and EUROCHAMBRES; a meeting with the Members of the European Parliament connected with several bilateral negotiations; a strategic debate between CEBRE and the European Commission representatives and stakeholders about the proper tools to support the partnership; and a meeting with the President of the employer’s section of the European Economic and Social Committee.

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TWO QUESTIONS FOR ONDŘEJ LIŠKA, CZECH MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

What is the relationship like between entrepreneurs and educators currently?

The relationship is good but can still be improved. I wish the two sides would understand it is not necessary to compete with each other but, on the contrary, to come together to meet each other.

What can the European Union do for partnership?

The biggest contribution of the Union is its rich source of experience and knowledge that it



From left: Ondřej Liška (Czech Minister for Education), Jakko Weuro (vice-president of European Youth Forum), Caroline Jenner (CEO of JA-YE), Christian Weinberger (advisor DG ENTR, European Commission) and Tanya Borges-Müller (president of JADE)

can share and create effective tools for strengthening partnerships. In this way it is possible to contribute to a more effective and competitive Europe.

CZECH ENERGY DAY IN BRUSSELS

December 10, 2008

On December 10, 2008, the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU and the Czech power company CEZ Group will organize the Czech Energy Day in Brussels 2008.

The Czech Energy Day will be the flagship event of the Czech Presidency of the EU, which begins in January of 2009. The event will begin with an international conference at the Permanent Representation of the Czech Republic to the EU located at 15 Rue Caroly, Brussels. The conference will be a forum for policy makers from the Czech government, the European Commission and the European Parliament. It will also include select representatives of the European energy industry, policy think-tanks BUSINESSEUROPE and EURELECTRIC and several other partner organisations involved in the European discussion of the challenges, possibilities and solutions related to European and Czech energy policy. Topics to be discussed will include security of energy supply, sustainable technology and investment development, energy efficiency, nuclear energy and climate change policies. The forum will also cover business risk and opportunities as well as integrated energy solutions for EU Member States.

The conference will have several noteworthy speakers, including:

- Martin Riman, Minister for Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic
- Andris Piebalgs, Energy Commissioner
- Alejo Vidal-Quadras, Vice-President of the European Parliament
- Martin Roman, CEO of the Czech power company CEZ, a.s.

The Czech Energy Day will conclude with a dinner party at Concert Noble with distinguished guests Mr. Mirek Topolánek, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, and Ms. Milena Vicenova, Czech Ambassador to the EU.



FINANCIAL CRISIS STRESS THE NEED FOR SBA

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During the discussion, **Jiří Plecítý**, Member of the Cabinet of Vice-President Verheugen, stressed the main goals of the SBA and pointed out that unlocking the potential of SMEs must be seen as part of the solution to the economic problems and the related financial crisis. "The devil is often hidden in the practice on the ground, rather than in the legal framework or in a lack of ideas," Plecítý said.

SBA Schedule

Proposal adopted by European Commission	25th June 2008
Discussion Competitiveness Council of the EU	25th September 2008
Draft report of European Parliament (rapporteur Edith Herzog)	28th October 2008
Competitiveness Council	1st and 2nd December 2008
European Council	11th and 12th December 2008
European Parliament plenary sitting	18th February 2009

Petr Dolejší, Czech Attaché for Competitiveness, further emphasized that the Czech Presidency will focus especially on a full implementation of "one-stop" registration, a reduction of administrative burdens for SMEs and the time required to set up a business (to less than one week), and a reduction of the 100 euro fee necessary to register a business. **Jan Březina**, a member of the European Parliament, was more critical of the proposal supporting SMEs. Březina observed that the SBA could be a progressive step in improving

communication between local and national authorities. "It would be a great success if the 'only once' principle was at least fully implemented in all the Member States," Březina said.

During the Business Breakfast, **Andrea Benassi**, Secretary General of UEAPME, welcomed the effort of the Commission and Member States to enhance the role of SMEs. Still, Benassi commented, the "declaration of intentions is not enough. What really counts is the implementation of SBA principles."

Director of European Affairs of Eurochambres **Ben Butters** later pointed out that, "improving the environment for SMEs is more of a priority than ever in light of the economic crisis." Discussion of the impact of the current financial crises could not be avoided during the Business Breakfast since an effective SME policy could help the Member States to deal better with the present economic difficulties. For now, the most important question is how SBA measures and principles will be implemented.



Speakers of Business Breakfast on SBA

LIŠKA ON BRUSSELS TOUR

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The participants in all meetings sincerely appreciated the attitude of the Minister and his team. At each discussion forum there were complaints that such an active and communicative minister interested in stakeholders' opinions is, during preparations for the Presidency of any Member Country, a rare exception. According to the European Youth Forum, represented by Vice-President Jakko Weuro, education is a horizontal issue. For active young

people, the priority is recognition by the employers of abilities and knowledge acquired within the framework of informal education. However, an important role is also played by the activity and self-responsibility of young people, which is supported by the concept of student non-profit organisations providing professional services to companies within the framework of the JADE Organisation, represented by President Tanya Borges-Muller.

What You Shouldn't Miss

November 10-11, 2008

LOBBYING IN THE EU with Daniel Guéguen

Daniel Guéguen, a top EU lobbyist in Brussels, will discuss EU lobbying strategies with Czech entrepreneurs in Prague at a specialized training conference organized by the Senate Chamber of the Czech Parliament, the Confederation of Industry, and CEBRE.

December 2, 2008

POLICY CAFÉ ON ENERGY

How will the full auctioning of emission allowances affect the European energy sector? Find out at a policy café organized by CEBRE in cooperation with ČEZ Group and MEP Jan Březina, a member of the ITRE Committee in the European Parliament.

December 3, 2008

BUSINESS BREAKFAST ON CZECH PRESIDENCY

Are you familiar with the Czech Presidency's priorities? Come learn about the Czech Presidency's plans for business at a Business Breakfast at 8:30 in the Czech House. Representatives of the Czech public administration, European institutions and members of the business community will be discussing their vision of the future of Europe.

December 10, 2008

CZECH ENERGY DAYS

What are the challenges, possibilities, and solutions for the future of European and Czech energy policy? An international conference will be held at the Czech Permanent Representation to address these important issues. Attendees will include high-level policymakers from the Czech government, European Commission, and European Parliament as well as representatives of the European energy industry, policy think tanks BUSINESSEUROPE and EURELECTRIC, and other partners.

**Any questions or comments?
Interested in participating
in some events?**

Contact us at:

cebre.europa@mail.be

**AVAILABLE
IN BRUSSELS!**



Events

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT OF ENTERPRISES (October 14, 2008)

Over 650 entrepreneurs of all sizes and sectors from 45 European countries conveyed the concerns of 23 million enterprises in the EU during debates and voting on crucial political topics at the Brussels Hemicycle of the European Parliament. "I have never seen so many people in the Hemicycle," said the president of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering at the opening of the European Parliament of Enterprises.

The EPE event was organized by EUROCHAMBRES to stress the key role of European busi-



Hemicycle hall finally full

nesses and the importance of such businesses' participation in the EU consultative process. The ongoing financial crisis was the foremost topic of

POLICY CAFÉ ON EU BLUE CARDS (November 4, 2008)

Too demanding definition of qualified employers and setting high minimum wage limit can harm the EU Blue Cards. Nevertheless this initiative has to be supported and properly promoted by all parties involved including business organisations. These are the conclusions of a Policy Café on Blue cards organized by CEBRE, DA (Danish Employer's Federation) and MEP Richard Falbr, a member of EMPL Committee. MEPs, business representatives and other stakeholders discussed the directive proposal on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals

BUSINESS BREAKFAST – GREENING TRANSPORT IN EUROPE (November 5, 2008)

CEBRE held a Business Breakfast on greening transport in Europe in the Czech House. Representatives from EU institutions, the Ministry of Transport, the European Parliament, International Road Transport, and the business community discussed the Greening Transport Package as well as the "Eurovignette" directive and its potential impact



Czech business voting on the EU legislative proposals during the EPE event.

discussion. The breadth of the crisis in the business sector was also evident during the voting period: 66% of participants will be obliged to review their investment plans and half of them are already encountering tighter credit conditions.

A delegation of 20 Czech companies spent the day in Brussels discussing the EU affairs, beginning with a business breakfast with CEBRE and Czech representatives from the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Czech Permanent Representation. During the afternoon's voting, Zuzana Krejčířiková from ČEZ Group called upon the Commission and MEP for a more efficient energy policy.

for the purposes of highly qualified employment prior to the Parliamentary plenary vote.



From left: Jan Tadeusz Masiel, MEP; Richard Falbr, MEP and Michal Kadera, CEBRE

on the competitiveness of the EU transport sector. Although the transporters are fully aware of the negative effects of the use of heavy charge vehicles, they are not the only contributors to the problem. An in-depth analysis is needed to revise the "Eurovignette" directive and the strategy of internalization of external costs. New provisions should not decrease the competitiveness of the European transport sector.