

# WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE NEW EU CZECH PRESIDENCY



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This month, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union passed into the hands of the Czech Republic, which will be leading the EU-27 during the next six months.

**By Brenda Azzopardi.**

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The Czech Presidency's priorities, which have been outlined by the country's Prime Minister, Mirek Topolánek, have been referred to as “the 3 E's – Economy, Energy and External Relations”. In the prevailing international financial crisis, the Czechs' economic ambitions would be to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and to boost European consumer confidence. Another priority is to encourage employment. The motto for the coming six months is “A Europe without barriers” - an initiative to prod EU Member States to fully remove labour market barriers that are still being faced by citizens of the new Member States.

The new Presidency is strongly backing a European strategy for better security of energy supply through the replacement of imported fossil fuels by new technologies and greater territorial diversification of supply. It will also strive to accomplish a common energy policy. On external relations, the emphasis is on more balanced EU-US relations, which will be set in motion once US President-elect Barack Obama takes up office in late January to confront global challenges through a multilateral approach. Although Enlargement could have been the fourth ‘E’ among the Czech Presidency's priorities, the widening of the EU in the Western Balkan region will persistently continue to overcome the more wary older Members.



An EU-Balkans summit during this chairmanship will also take place. In May, the 10 Member States that joined in 2004, including Malta, will be celebrating the 5th anniversary of EU accession. Unlike other enlargements, the one of 2004 was more distinctive, since countries that until a few years earlier were led by Communist regimes, were well placed to become EU Member States, emphasising the idea of a successfully reunified Europe.

A detailed programme, which forms part of the 18-month work programme of the ‘EU-trio’ Presidency, was also issued, outlining the work and targets of the French, the Czechs and the Swedish. Sweden will take over the EU presidency this July. EU citizens can freely access a website for information about the upcoming events organised by the Presidency as well as other related information. Indeed, one common primary objective for the three presidencies is the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty which is expected to come about at the end of the year. The Czech parliament still needs to ratify the Lisbon Treaty. In the meantime, the presidencies are well aware of guaranteeing the continuity of European policies. ☺

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