

PRESS CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference of Aspen Institute CE Confirmed the Dependence of the Country's Future on a Values-based Policy

Prague, December 1, 2022 - Investment in values-based changes is beneficial for the Czech nation. The speakers at the Annual Conference [The Shape of \(Central\) Europe 2022](#) led a fruitful debate about, among other things, the role of values in turbulent times. The Annual Conference was held on Wednesday, November 30, and was organized by Aspen Institute Central Europe in cooperation with media house [Economia](#).

If a leader wants to understand their society, they have to understand social trends and the groups that respond to them. Knowing that the leader has similar beliefs improves cohesion and a willingness to work together. At the state level, however, there is a need to have values that enable the functioning of a democratic establishment and a society with a high ratio of civil liberties.

Yes to compromises, but not at the expense of values

According to the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, **Petr Fiala**, every good policy is also a values policy. "*No political solution will last long if it lacks the values base,*" stated Petr Fiala in his opening speech. According to the Prime Minister, there are three basic values that we should not forget. They are **Freedom**, a fragile value as has been shown by the Ukrainian struggle against Russian aggression, **Solidarity**, which is manifested mainly in the crises that society has recently faced, and last but not least, **Responsibility**. According to Petr Fiala, this proved to be especially important during the Czech presidency of the Council of the European Union, when we were not only responsible for ourselves, but also for events in the whole of Europe. "It turns out that these values are shared by a large part of our society," Fiala added.

Pavol Kosnáč, Director of DEKK Institute, researcher and employee of Masaryk University, emphasized that there has been a significant value shift in society over the past 30 years. At the same time, however, he pointed out that the modern era with modern values can only survive if there is trust, which has proved crucial during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Andrej Kiska, Former President of Slovakia recalled the events of November 17 in his keynote speech and the values which people fought for at that time: freedom, truth, hope, decency and dignity. According to Andrej Kiska, we have not yet given up the ideals which they took to the streets for. *"We make compromises all our lives, but we must never bend the value lines, not even if everyone opposes us, not even if we end up losing everything,"* he emphasized.

The former Prime Minister of Finland, **Alexander Stubb**, was another important guest who spoke about values based leadership. He also confirmed how important values based leadership is in today's war-torn era. In his speech, he talked about three essential points: values, interests and how we can combine values and interests in a world in which conflict, competition, but also cooperation reign. Even in today's democratic era, we have to conduct a mutual and open values dialogue on multiple levels. Every country, every continent, has different interests and we have to find mutual consensus.

Updating security strategies is in order

The second panel was focused on **Security – Innovations: Defense in Times of Interstate Conflicts at the Strategic Level**.

The panel discussion was opened by **Daniel Koštoval**, safety analyst at the Prague Center of Transatlantic Relations, with his study entitled Defense in Times of Interstate Conflicts at the Strategic Level. *"The Czech Republic and the European Union are in a new safety environment. Until the beginning of this decade, when the main safety risk was terrorism, now it's rivalry between great powers,"* he stated.

We live in times when certain state representatives perceive using force as the best option to achieve political goals. We are, therefore, facing direct strategic threats, when securing the country's safety has to be a nationwide matter with nationwide preparedness. The least expensive option is a functional defense system, where the army during peaceful times can effectively transform into an army during times of war which is large enough to fend off an attack.

According to **Jan Jireš**, Deputy Minister of Defence for Defence Policy and Planning, the Ministry of Defense of the Czech Republic, we are at the beginning of very significant updates to all national security strategies. According to him, as of February of this year, it has become apparent how nations in the West can be united. Jireš also expressed his belief that in the context of the Russian war in

Ukraine, this connection will persist in the most important security issues. "The unity of the West is essential. And the West remains united," he added.

The Czech Civil Service is undergoing a challenging test

The third panel of the conference was traditionally devoted to **The Effectiveness of the Czech Civil Service**. Over the last three years, the Czech Civil Service has faced a number of events that tested its ability to deal with crisis situations. The most pressing ones were undoubtedly the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the current energy crisis.

As stated by **Dan Svoboda**, managing partner of McKinsey & Company and one of the authors of the study *Effective Civil Service – Inspiration for Urgent and Complex Challenges*, the demands on the ability of the civil service to quickly and effectively solve complex challenges are increasing. According to another speaker, Lieutenant-General Vladimír Vlček, General Director, Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, the key changes needed to make the civil service more efficient include a change in perception, dynamism, and above all, flexibility in times of crisis. "*Civil service is not just crisis management. We have to be able to apply the experience we gain during the given crisis even to the times when we are not facing any crisis,*" he added.

Vít Rakušan, first Deputy Prime Minister / Minister of the Interior of the Czech Republic, then emphasized the need to simplify and digitize processes and civil service. The young generation is not the only which is no longer willing to wait in queues. Citizens want to manage everything they need by phone from their homes. And if the government is unable to deliver this to the people in the near future, distrust, tension, the division of society and the fact that people do not trust the state will only deepen. He also made mention of the necessity of training civil employees in the field of data, as it is precisely a quality analytical team and reliable data that play a major role in decision-making.

Jana Vohralíková, Secretary General, Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, said that we should not forget that the effectiveness of civil service is not only about crisis management, but about the overall establishment of processes that work for people. She also returned to the opening speeches of government representatives. In her view, everything starts with an enlightened and inspiring leader who properly motivates and manages their team.

Significant changes await the Czech labor market

The Future of the Czech Labor Market then became the topic of the fourth panel of the Annual Conference. **Jiří Švejcar**, Partner and Associate Director of the Boston Consulting Group, pointed out in the introductory video that significant changes await the Czech economy. Green resources, circular energy, the tertiary sector, an aging population, automation, robotization and digitization – all of this has a major impact on the future labor market. Currently, there is a shortage of approximately 180,000 employees, but by 2030, approximately 330,000 employees will lose their jobs due to the disappearance of their jobs. At the same time, more than half a million new jobs will be created. The workforce will also age by 2030, with the number of people aged 50-65 growing by 18% and becoming the main workforce. The shortage of workers will grow to 400,000 in 2040.

Tomáš Ervín Dombrovský, Head of Analysis, LMC, pointed out the problem of people in middle or older working age. Getting a position in a new company and having a chance to start a new career is extremely difficult for them. It is precisely this group over 45 which is dominant on the labor market and it is therefore extremely important. According to Marian Jurečka, Deputy Prime Minister / Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Government of the Czech Republic, it is also important to find a way to help parents return to the working environment as quickly as possible. The same goes for pensioners who can still work and be beneficial to the Czech economy.

Philosophy and responsibility as the basis of education

The last panel discussion was devoted to **Education: A Successful Local Educational System**. It began by presenting the results of a study: Why is Education in Certain Regions Significantly Better than the Social Situation Would Indicate? In most of the Czech Republic, 3% of young students do not complete nine-year elementary school studies, in a tenth of the country it is up to 10-20%. The aim of the analysis, which was presented at the beginning by **Daniel Prokop**, founder of PAQ Research, was to therefore describe the good practice of municipalities with extended powers that try to regulate educational problems in connection with social problems. The Czech Republic is a country where the results of students are largely dependent on the social situation of families.

Jaroslav Jirásko, Manager of Eduzměna Kutnohorsko, emphasized the contribution of teaching assistants, who, however, often do not feel supported in their personal

development. In his view, it is important to take care of them so that they can do quality work.

The Deputy Governor, South Moravian Region, **Jiří Nantl**, followed up with a reminder that with changes in society, education and the teaching profession also change, so there is a need to adapt to new ways of teaching. An important role is then played by one's own philosophy, which is a sign of a good teacher and which should be upheld and applied by the school principal him or herself.

Just as the Prime Minister Petr Fiala spoke about responsibility in his opening speech, the principal of Trmice elementary school **Marie Gottfriedová** highlighted its importance in the end. "*We teach our children best by our own example. When we are able to take care of the weakest, it becomes visible to the whole community, and the children then take this example into their lives,*" she added.

About Aspen Institute Central Europe

The Aspen Institute Central Europe serves as a non-partisan platform where politicians and representatives of business, as well as leading artists, athletes, scientists, and journalists can meet and interact. The Institute facilitates interdisciplinary and regional cooperation, and supports young Central European leaders in their development.

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