

Central European Update

Czech Republic

Czech Prime Minister **Stanislav Gross** and Foreign Minister **Cyril Svoboda** were among the many heads of state that signed the European Union Constitution on 29 October at a special ceremony at the Renaissance Campidoglio Palace in Rome. The newly signed Constitution will need to be ratified by all 25 EU member states, either by referendum or by parliamentary vote. The Czech Republic is one of nine EU countries holding a referendum. Prime Minister Gross seeks to hold the referendum in conjunction with parliamentary elections in 2006. The prime minister defended his position by saying it would save the state 300 to 400 million Czech crowns (\$13-15 million), and would reveal the true position of individual parties towards the EU.

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As of 1 November the European arrest warrant will be adopted in the Czech Republic. Czech MPs approved the move, which was vetoed by President **Vaclav Klaus** at the end of August. The document outlines extradition procedures for suspects of serious crimes, such as terrorism, murder, hijacking, rape, human trafficking, and sexual abuse of children. The aim of the EU arrest warrant is to help tackle

cross-border crime, prevent criminals from eluding prosecution, and to help in the fight against terrorism and organized crime across Europe.

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On 1 November the Swiss President **Joseph Deiss** embarked on a two-day official visit to the Czech Republic. President Deiss met with his Czech counterpart, **Vaclav Klaus**, as well as other senior politicians. Even though, Switzerland is neither an EU member nor part of NATO, it plans to donate funds to the new EU member states in order to help balance out economic differences within the Union. The Czech Republic welcomes such financial support, which could be used to improve infrastructure, research, and technology education.

Poland

On 27 October, **Teresa Borcz-Kalifa**, a Polish woman living in Iraq was abducted by a terrorist group styled as the Salafist Brigades of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq. The kidnappers demanded the withdrawal of Polish troops from Iraq and the freeing of all Iraqi women held by the coalition in the Abu Ghraib prison. Polish authorities have ruled out any negotiations with terrorists. The Defense Min-

ister **Jerzy Szmajdzinski** approved a potential operation by the elite Polish unit GROM to free the hostage. Foreign Minister **Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz** said Polish women living with their families in Iraq have been encouraged to return to Poland, due to terrorist threats faced by Polish citizens.

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On 29 October, Poland signed the EU Constitution after holding out against it, due to the absence of any reference in the document to Europe's Christian heritage. Poland may hold a referendum on the Constitution at the same time as presidential elections in October 2005. According to the latest opinion poll, 56 percent of Poles are in favor of ratifying the constitution.

Slovakia

The Slovak parliament passed the bill liberalizing the country's energy market in line with EU directives. The provision will enter into force in January 2005 for companies and in July 2005 for households. The law separates energy distribution from trade in order to prevent monopoly and cross-subsidization and allows consumers to choose their electricity and natural gas providers.

Hungary

Prime Minister **Ferenc Gyurcsany** announced that Hungary would withdraw its 300-soldiers from Iraq by March 2005. Although Iraq's interim government asked Budapest to stay for another year, the extension will only be valid for three months. The reason for this decision was both financial and political, due to mounting criticism from the public and the opposition. Since the death of a Hungarian soldier and the country's alleged appearance on the *Al Qaeda* target list, 60 percent of Hungarians want to see their soldiers return as soon as possible. Minister of Defense **Ferenc Juhász** explained that the timing of the decision was purposeful. The government did not want the withdrawal to become an issue in the U.S. election campaign, but it also intended to demonstrate that the decision was made regardless of the winner.



Featured Photo: Bójnice Castle, Slovakia

Baltic States Update

Lithuania

A center-left coalition in parliament solidified this week in Vilnius when the outgoing Social Democrat-led left coalition signed an agreement with the populist Labor Party. The new center-left coalition agreed to keep **Algirdas Brazauskas** as Prime Minister and to instate **Arturas Paulauskas** as parliamentary speaker. The parties plan on approving a cabinet with six Labor nominees and seven from the Social Democratic Party – Social Liberal coalition. However, the parties will maintain tenuous control in parliament, as they only captured 70 of 141 seats. Chairman of the Liberal and Center Union **Arturas Zuokas** announced that his party would consider

joining if Labor Party Chairman **Viktor Uspaskikh** is denied a position in government.

Estonia

Marko Michelson, chairman of Estonia's foreign relations committee, headed a delegation to Azerbaijan to meet with Azeri foreign minister **Elmar Mammadyarov** and members of the nation's parliament. The 1 November visit was largely prompted by growing Estonian concerns over the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Michelson stated that Estonia supports both a peaceful resolution to the conflict and Azeri integration into NATO and the European economy. The delegation also discussed the current construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-

Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, which will connect Azeri oil and gas resources to European markets via Turkey. Estonian officials have already visited Armenia and Georgia and plan to stop in Turkey before returning home.

Latvia

At the request of the next European Commission President **Jose Manuel Barroso**, **Andris Piebalgs** will replace **Ingrida Udre** as a nominee for the EC Tax and Customs Portfolio. Udre was among several contentious cabinet nominees. Her candidacy caused some controversy and Barroso delayed the 27 October cabinet approval process when it became apparent that the European Parliament would vote against the originally proposed selections.

Southeast European Update

Croatia

The Croatian Foreign Ministry confirmed on 2 November the death of a missing Croatian truck driver. He was killed when insurgents attacked his convoy near Mosul on 23 October. This is the first Croatian casualty in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion. Another Croat truck driver is being held by U.S. forces at Camp Bucca in southern Iraq. **Damir Mikulic** is accused of gathering suspicious information including vehicle details and eight hours of video footage of military bases and military exercises. The Foreign Ministry has requested detailed information on the charges against Mikulic from the U.S. Department of State.

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Two Russian-made Mi-8 helicopters in the Croatian Air Force were upgraded by Czech Aviation Services. The firm was chosen by the U.S. government to complete a \$1.5 million military project.

Modern navigation and communications equipment was installed to bring the helicopters up to NATO standards. The helicopters will be used on peacekeeping missions and in training exercises outside Croatia.

Slovenia

On 3 November President **Janez Drnovsek** nominated **Janez Jansa** as Prime Minister and asked him to form a new government. Jansa is the leader of the center-right Slovenian Social Democratic Party, which narrowly won last month's presidential elections. Jansa was a dissident in communist Yugoslavia who fought for independence. He has served as defense minister for both conservative and liberal governments. Parliament will vote whether to accept his nomination within the next seven days, but Jansa is expected to win.

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Ljubljana is petitioning for the extradition of a Slovenian citizen

from the United States. **Davorin Sadar** fled the country two years ago while awaiting trial for financial fraud. He was apprehended crossing the U.S.-Mexico border and is being held by the Department of Homeland Security. Sadar was arrested for the illegal trading of stocks as director of Dadas, an investment management company.

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Following an appeal by Netherlands' EU representatives, the Slovenian government will send financial aid to the Darfur province in Sudan. The aid will be managed by UNICEF and will finance humanitarian and medical services during the ongoing ethnic war. Slovenia made a previous donation of \$15,000 to *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (Doctors without Borders) in Darfur.

Bulgaria

On 29 October Deputy Prime Minister Plamen Panayotov an-

nounced Bulgaria's plans to expand its military presence in Afghanistan. The additional Bulgarian troops will take up the responsibility of securing Kabul's airport between June and September of 2006. Military officials also plan to restructure the existing contingent to cover locations outside of Kabul as well. Bulgaria will fully finance its force's involvement.

Romania

Prime Minister **Adrian Nastase** stressed the need to improve economic ties with Germany at a Romanian-German conference on 3 November in Essen. The purpose of the conference was to boost German investments in Romania. A planning group on Romanian-German cooperation in military equipment also organized their eighth meeting this week in Bucharest. The meeting was held to discuss the 2005 plan for cooperation in military hardware including anti-aircraft machinery.

Reactions to the U.S. Presidential Elections

"Terrorism has to be rejected in today's world and in this respect George Bush is a very decisive leader who is right, simply right...from Poland's perspective continued cooperation with George Bush is really good news." **Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski.**

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"President Bush proved that he is a true leader of his people in tough times and American voters proved they valued this. He symbolizes America's best traditions: the love of freedom, optimism, individualism, a liberal economic environment and conservative values that are also close to my heart." **Czech President Vaclav Klaus.**

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"Romania will win in a way through the continuation of a beneficial relationship." **Romanian President Ion Iliescu.**

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"Congratulations to reelected U.S. President George W. Bush who won the American elections by a convincing margin. The motto of Hungarian foreign policy in recent months has been 'Hungary is our country, Europe is our home and America is our ally.'"

Hungarian Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany.

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"Relations between Bulgaria and the United States are strategic by nature and go beyond factors such as the concrete results of the presidential elections. I have no doubt that regardless of the results of the U.S. presidential election we would continue to maintain an active political dialogue between the two countries and the prospects for further cooperation would only improve." **Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister Gergana Gruncharova on 1 November.**

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"I consider the election of George Bush a very good thing. Not only the United States, but the trans-Atlantic Alliance and the democratic world need for the president of the United States to be a person, a leader, who will successfully lead the fight against international terrorism to its end. I am absolutely convinced that Mr. Bush is just such a leader." **Slovakia's Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda.**

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"I am confident that under [Bush's] effective leadership the United States will continue to be the world leader and watch out for peace, stability and democracy. Regardless of the complexities of the modern world, Ukraine was and remains reliable strategic partner of America. I believe that the second term of [Bush's] presidency will mark a new stage of the building of constructive Ukrainian-American cooperation based on the commonality of the democratic values and similarity of interests in the international arena." **Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma.**

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"Bush has proved to be a firm politician, a man of strong character. He is a consistent, reliable, and predictable partner." **Russian President Vladimir Putin.**

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"In his first term George Bush had to deal with the horrifying onslaught of terrorism. I hope his second term will see the United States and the whole world enjoy the political stabilization and the guarantee of collective security we have all done our utmost to ensure." **European Commission President Romano Prodi.**

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