

Central European Update

Czech Republic

The defense ministry has confirmed that the army is building a military hospital for high-level biological protection against infectious diseases, which would be a part of NATO's cutting edge facilities. **Andrei Cirtek**, defense ministry spokesman, announced that the hospital would be located in the Center for Bioprotection in Techonin, Usti nad Orlici region.

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On 18 October, the daily *Hospodarske Noviny* reported that investment in information technologies is growing in the Czech Republic. An attractive geographic location, a relatively cheap but skilled workforce, and good infrastructure are the main reasons behind the decision of major IT companies to build their development and customer service centers in the Czech Republic. Dell Computer, Oracle, SAP and the U.S. company Computer Associates are among the largest investors in the country.

Hungary

On 17 October the 77 tanks that Budapest donated to the Iraqi army left Hungary. Transportation of the armored vehicles is provided by NATO aircraft.

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On 17 October Indonesian Foreign Minister **Hassan Wirajuda** met Hungary's Information Technology and Communications Minister **Kalman Kovacs**. They discussed flour-

ishing trade relations between the two countries in the IT sector and possible cooperation on tourism, agriculture, and infrastructure projects.

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On 20 October the Hungarian and Romanian prime ministers met in Bucharest to discuss boosting cooperation in fields such as environment, IT, and cross-border protection. The meeting resulted in 15 new bilateral agreements. Hungarian Prime Minister **Ferenc Gyurcsany** highlighted the need for collaboration to develop the motorway network across the Hungarian-Romanian border.

Poland

According to a 14-15 October opinion poll by PBS Institute, the Civic Platform (PO) presidential candidate **Donald Tusk** leads in the presidential race with 55 percent, ahead of Law and Justice (PiS) candidate **Lech Kaczynski** with 45 percent support. A separate poll conducted by TNS OBOP on 16 October shows 57 percent supporting Tusk and 43 percent backing Kaczynski. The second round of the presidential election will be held on 23 October as neither of the two top contenders received over 50 percent of the vote in the first round on 9 October.

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On 17 October, Law and Justice (PiS) prime ministerial candidate

Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz and Civic Platform (PO) deputy prime ministerial candidate **Jan Rokita** announced that work on building the new government is moving ahead as differences between the two parties are being resolved. The major policy differences revolve around public finances, health care system reform, and privatization. Nevertheless, Marcinkiewicz and Rokita are expected to sign a coalition agreement by the end of October.

Slovakia

On 17 October President **Ivan Gasparovic** chose sociologist **Iveta Radicova** as the new labor, social and family affairs minister, replacing **Ludovit Kanik**. Radicova was appointed professor at Oxford University last year and heads the Sociological Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. During her one-year mandate she will concentrate on unemployment, family policy, and children's rights and will continue to pursue the welfare and pension reforms initiated by the outgoing minister. Kanik resigned due to ethical problems linked with his family business.

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On 18 October the Slovak Constitutional Court declared part of the anti-discrimination law as unconstitutional. The legislation, which was supported in parliament by the

junior coalition member, the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK), in July 2004, aimed to protect the rights of the Slovak Roma minority and prevent ethnic discrimination through the introduction of affirmative action regulations. Justice Minister **Daniel Lipsic** and his Christian Democratic Party challenged the affirmative action law, because in their view it violates the principles of equality and gives unfair advantages to one group of citizens.

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Defense Ministry State Secretary **Martin Fedor** announced that Slovakia might send 40 troops to Bosnia-Herzegovina to participate in the European Union mission Althea. So far, four Slovak officers have participated in the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. The number of Slovak troops in Kosovo is also expected to increase. The proposals have yet to be approved by the government and the parliament.



Featured Photo: Oradea, Romania

Baltic States Update

Lithuania

On 18 October the French Armed Forces Commander General **Henri Bentegeat** told Lithuanian Defense Minister **Gediminas Kirkilas** that his country would send a group of pilots to Lithuania to participate in the NATO-authorized Baltic air patrol mission in April 2007. Currently, U.S. pilots flying F-16 Fighting Falcon jet fighters are policing the Baltic skies. They are due to be replaced by a Polish contingent in January 2006.

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On 19 October Lithuanian Foreign Minister **Antanas Valionis** signed a joint statement with Armenian Foreign Minister **Vardan Oskanyan** on regional cooperation and assistance with

European and Euroatlantic integration. According to Oskayan, Lithuania would be a key player in making sure that Armenia will have greater participation in the EU's European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).

Estonia

On 15 October Estonia's new ambassador to Russia, **Marina Kaljurand**, stated that Estonia does not have any territorial claims against Russia. In May, Estonia ratified its land and sea border agreements with Moscow. However, Russia refused to proceed with the agreement when the Estonian parliament supplemented it with a preamble referencing the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty in which Russia formally recognized Estonia's inde-

pendence. Kaljurand rejected the notion of holding new border talks, but advocated "good-neighborly" relations between Russia and Estonia, based on mutual understanding.

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On 17 October, preliminary results for local government elections indicated that the Centrist Party, led by Economy Minister **Edgar Savisaar**, gathered the most votes. The ballot elected some three thousand local and municipal officials to two hundred and twenty-seven city and regional governments. The Centrist Party obtained twenty-five percent of the vote nationwide and won majorities in the cities of Tallinn and Narva. The Centrist Party also gained

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significant support among the Russian-speaking minority with a policy of “resolving the problem of Russians’ social status, including citizenship and language issues.”

Latvia

After sharp criticism from Moscow, the Latvian government decided 18 October to put off discussion of a legislative bill that would have prevented the naturalization of some Russian-speaking residents charged with “disloyalty.”

Those applying for citizenship under the original Latvian Law on Citizenship were required to know rudimentary Latvian, be familiar with the country’s history, and meet certain criteria such as non-affiliation with the KGB or other repressive organizations that violated Latvian independence. The amended version of the law would require “loyalty to the republic.”

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On 19 October the Latvian National Security Council decided to blacklist Russian oligarch **Boris Berezovsky**. Currently, the Russian Gen-

eral Prosecutor’s Office is seeking the extradition of Berezovsky on charges of large-scale embezzlement. Latvian President **Vaira Vike-Freiberga** announced that Berezovsky is unwelcome in Latvia. The Russian oligarch visited Latvia twice this year, each time raising tensions between Moscow and Riga because the Latvian General Prosecutor’s Office refused to extradite him to Russia.

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Southeast European Update

Bulgaria

EU Enlargement Commissioner **Olli Rehn** stated on 14 October that any slowdown in judicial reform and the fight against organized crime and corruption could delay Bulgaria’s EU accession. Bulgarian Prime Minister **Sergei Stanishev** accepted the constructive criticism and expressed hope that Bulgaria’s EU bid would not be affected by internal EU problems. Rehn was visiting Bulgaria for final talks ahead of the release of the 25 October report by the European Commission assessing Sofia’s preparedness to join the Union in 2007.

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On 15 October, former prime minister **Simeon Saxecoburgotski** was reelected as leader of the National Movement Simeon II (NMS), the centrist party he established and headed since 2001. Although NMS lost its parliamentary majority in the June 2005 elections, it is still part of the governing coalition together with the Bulgarian Socialist Party. The third member of the ruling coalition is the largely ethnic Turkish Movement for Rights and Freedoms, which was NMS’ partner in the 2001-2005 government.

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On 17 October Bulgarian President **Georgi Parvanov** began his three-day trip to the United States, his first official visit since taking office in 2002. Parvanov was accompanied by a delegation that included Foreign Minister **Ivaylo Kalfin**, Defense Minister **Veselin Bliznakov**, and Economy Minister **Rumen Ovcharov**. President Parvanov was received at the White House by U.S. President **George**

W. Bush, where they discussed Bulgaria’s participation in the anti-terrorist coalition, the fate of the Bulgarian nurses in Libya, and the stationing of U.S. military bases in the Balkans. Parvanov expressed his gratitude for the U.S. backing of Sofia’s NATO membership and expressed his hope to see more American involvement in the modernization of Bulgaria’s armed forces and in key Balkan energy projects. On 18 October, Parvanov delivered a speech at a CSIS forum, where he outlined Bulgaria’s role as a generator of security and stability in the Balkans. During the three-day trip, the Bulgarian president also met with Senators **Richard Lugar** and **Ted Stevens**, as well as Rep. **Joe Wilson**, co-chair of the Bulgarian Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives. Before returning to Bulgaria, Parvanov visited the Bulgarian communities in Chicago and Boston. Simultaneously to the U.S. visit by the president, Bulgarian parliamentary speaker **Georgi Pirinski** led a delegation on an official trip to Moscow.

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On 17 October Bulgaria’s Supreme Administrative Court ruled the defense ministry’s decision to call off a deal with Israeli firm Elbit Systems as unlawful. Elbit was selected in December 2004 to repair and modernize 12 Russian-built Mi-24 attack helicopters and six Mi-17 transport helicopters for a total of \$74 million. The British BAE Systems, the French Sagem, and the Israeli IAI were among the other bidders in the public tender. Former defense minister **Nikolay Svinarov** decided to cancel the deal with Elbit, because the company allegedly “did not fulfill the initially stated criteria.” However,

the court verdict means that the defense ministry will resume talks with Elbit on the contract.

Croatia

On 19 October two U.S. congressmen met with Croatian Ambassador **Neven Jurica** and expressed their full support for Zagreb’s NATO bid. Rep. **George Radanovich** and Rep. **Peter Visclosky**, co-chairs of the Croatian congressional caucus established earlier this year, assured Jurica that they plan to work vigorously to promote U.S.-Croatian relations and to back the country’s future accession to both NATO and the EU.

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On 14 October, Croatia’s parliament voted to set 2009 as the target year for EU accession. The motion was backed by 95 of the 152 deputies. Since Brussels opened membership talks with Zagreb on 3 October this year, parliament has been working on passing a resolution to outline Croatia’s strategy for EU accession.

Romania

On 17 October Romanian Foreign Minister **Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu** chaired a session of the UN Security Council, which resulted in the adoption of a resolution outlining the framework of security cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. Resolution 1631 was championed by Romania, which holds the Security Council presidency for this month. The document hails all efforts for combating terrorism made in resulting in collaboration with local structures and delineates the role played by various regional

and sub-regional mechanisms in peacekeeping missions.

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Romania President **Traian Basescu** met with his South-Korean counterpart **Roh Moo-hyun** on 18 October to discuss bilateral ties and trade between the two countries. President Basescu stated that South Korea gives Romania “strong prospects for cooperation.” President Moo-hyun commented on the importance of Romania’s EU accession for business investment. The two parties signed a protocol to amend their economic, scientific, and technical collaboration agreements. Basescu urged representatives of Korean business circles to invest in Romania.

Slovenia

On 14 October Slovenian President **Janez Drnovsek** agreed with Croatia’s proposal to solve the border dispute between the two states through arbitration. Drnovsek said that bilateral negotiations on the issue had been exhausted and that a pronouncement by an international body would diffuse political tensions.

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On 20 October Slovenian Foreign Minister **Dimitrij Rupel** offered his country as a site for the upcoming talks between Serbian and Kosovar authorities over Kosova’s final status. Slovenian President **Janez Drnovsek** announced plans to visit Belgrade and Prishtina next month to present the details of Slovenia’s initiative for hosting the final status talks. However, the government in Belgrade rejected Drnovsek’s visit in protest over his alleged support for Kosova’s independence.

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