



Editor's Notes for The New Presence 3/2005

Dear readers,

From the terrorist attacks in London, the Israeli pullout from Gaza, and the devastating floods in the United States, this summer's so-called "Cucumber season" has proven to be full of tragic, important, and historic events all over the world. The Czech Republic has been no exception, with a steady stream of political scandals providing a viable alternative to the advent of "reality television" in the country. A couple of months ago, I was discussing the thorny issue of Czech politics with a Czech friend of mine. I can't remember what current scandal or issue had so captured our attention — perhaps it was the fact that Czech politicians enjoy lifelong immunity for crimes committed whilst in office, perhaps it was the fact that the government is planning to build a motorway through the heart of one of the country's most beautiful nature reserves, ironically called "Czech Paradise" ("Český Ráj"), or perhaps it was the fact that television Nova was getting away with showing obscene material in its Big Brother programme, well before the so-called night-time "watershed" — but what I do recall is that the discussion led my friend to quirk "Don't you know? This is the 'land of possibilities!'" Of course, this ironic remark was not intended to reflect the country's entrepreneurial spirit or optimistic outlook, but rather was meant to imply that in this country, despite all that is positive, no corruption scandal, political speech, or controversy should surprise anyone anymore. It was, I thought, a typically dark-humoured Czech reaction.

In this issue, commentator Jan Urban turns his caustic eye to analyzing recent events in the country. With Czech Euro-commissioner Vladimír Špidla announcing that falling birth-rates would mean that the last Czech would die in the year 2401, Zoe Pollock examines the role that immigration plays and has played in the Czech Republic and the former Czechoslovakia. Jirí Kolár takes us on a fascinating journey through the surprisingly large Czech contribution to space travel and astronomy, and examines how the fall of Communism has led to a rethink of the country's approach to space.

Looking further afield into Europe, Michal Romancov provides a stinging critique of the recent celebrations in Moscow to mark the end of World War II, whilst Bedrich Utitz examines the increasingly important issue of potential Turkish membership in the European Union. With the emergence of the EU onto the global stage, our feature author Asmara Ghebremichael contrasts this new power with the United States, and asks some crucial questions about the priorities of each.

We also have a special section devoted to Albania and Kosovo, in which writers including Jolyon Naegele, Filip Tesar, and Hana Tomková guide us

through the many issues that blight this troubled, neglected, yet fascinating region.

Finally, we also have a short story from award-winning Czech writer Jaroslav Rudis, a look at a very special Czech cultural phenomenon by way of a comic strip, several interviews including one with arguably the country's best band, and much more. I hope as ever, that you will enjoy the magazine.

Dominik Jun

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