

Czech-US nuclear diplomacy

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The Czech prime minister, Petr Nečas, visited the USA on 26–27 October. The culmination of his visit was his meeting with President Barack Obama. Nečas and Obama made a joint statement declaring their will to: sign a reciprocal defence procurement agreement, establish a centre for Czech-US co-operation in the civilian nuclear energy area in Prague and on joint efforts for the implementation of the goals determined in the Open Government Partnership Initiative (OGP), an inter-governmental platform for promoting the rule of law. One of the key issues discussed by the Czech prime minister and the US president was the tender for two new reactors at the Czech nuclear power plant in Temelín (with an option of building three reactors in other locations). The US-Japanese firm, Westinghouse is one of the three participants in this tender. The NATO summit due to be held in May 2012 in Chicago was another important issue on the agenda. The government led by Prime Minister Nečas wants a NATO training centre for helicopter pilots to be established in the Czech Republic as part of the Smart Defence concept to be discussed during the summit.

Commentary

- The commitments made in the joint statement and the high rank the US administration has granted to this visit prove that the US government wishes to offer an important support to Westinghouse in the Czech tender, currently one of the largest of this kind in the world. The selection of the contractor is planned for the end of 2013 (the other two participants in the tender are France's Areva and the Russian-Czech consortium Atomstroyexport-Škoda-JS). Victory in the tender would be a major argument for each of these firms in their efforts to win other bids for the construction of reactors (for example in Poland).
- Remembering the unsuccessful co-operation on the missile-defence shield, the Czech Republic does not wish any individual issue to dominate its relations with the USA. As the USA is increasingly interested in the Czech Republic, Prague is capitalising on this and is making efforts to convince the USA to become engaged in several different projects mainly in the areas of security, scientific and technical co-operation (including in the area of nuclear energy) and co-operation on projects aimed at promoting democracy.
- The Czech Republic will remain an area of special interest for the USA, France and Russia until the end of 2013 due to the tender for the new Temelín's reactor blocs. Czech

diplomacy is trying to play skilfully on the ambitions of each of the bidders, emphasising at the same time that they all stand an equal chance. By applying this tactic the Czech Republic wishes to gain the best possible economic offer (low price, the participation of local firms in the construction and additional investments in the Czech Republic) and also to enhance relations with the countries of origin of the bidders in other areas.