

The Czech Republic: A dispute over the coordination of EU issues

The co-governing conservative parties TOP 09 and the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) are vying for predominance on the right wing of the political scene. The most essential dispute concerns European policy coordination. The issue of responsibility for the European agenda may turn out to be a source of incessant competence disputes inside the government.

Complying with the coalition agreement, the centre-right government led by Petr Necas (ODS) has liquidated the post of minister for European Affairs and entrusted the prime minister with the task of European policy coordination. In order for the head of government to be able to carry out this task, he must have a special department in the government's office which will co-operate with the foreign ministry. Prime Minister Necas wants a secretary of state to be the head of this department. However, in the opinion of TOP 09, an official of such a high rank will in fact be a new minister for European affairs, whose activity will seriously limit the competences of the leader of TOP 09 Karel Schwarzenberg, who is deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs.

On 31 August the presidium of TOP 09 appealed to their coalition partners for a "consistent implementation of the coalition agreement and the agreed government agenda," which can be seen as the adoption of a tougher stance. Even if the prime minister succeeds in getting the consent of his coalition partners for the nomination of his candidate (at present this is Ivan Hodac, secretary general of the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association), his political position may be too weak to smoothly coordinate EU-related issues. This makes it difficult for the Czech Republic to develop a coherent stance on European policy issues.

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