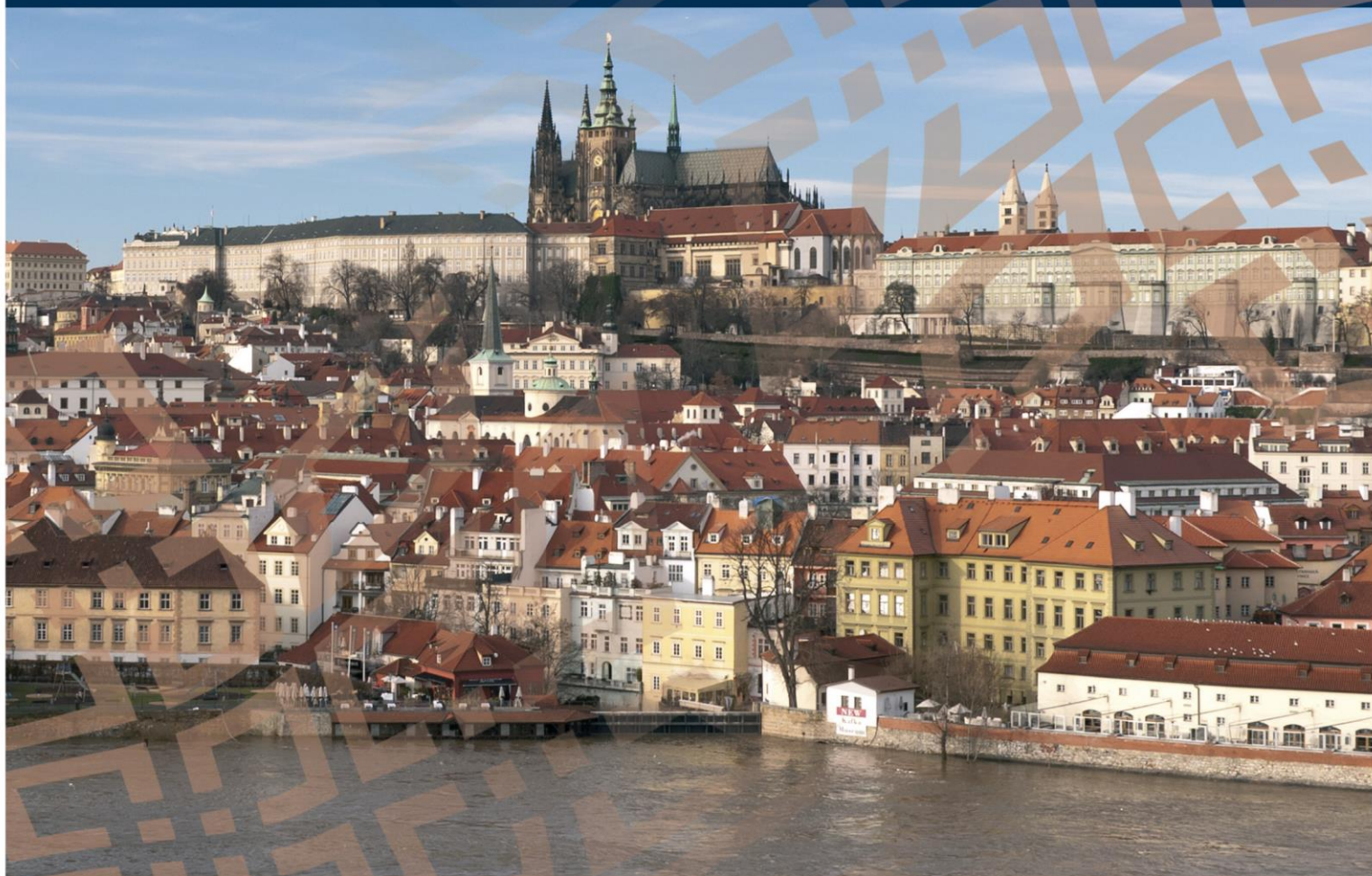




CENTRUM TRANSATLANTICKÝCH VZTAHŮ
Prague Centre for Transatlantic Relations

PCTR Newsletter

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PCTR / CEVRO INSTITUT

Jungmannova 17 / 110 00 Praha 1 / Czech Republic

tel.: + 420 221 506 737

email: pctr@vsci.cz / www.cevroinstitut.cz

Message from the Director

Dear readers,

The year 2015 is already over and I would like to wish you a lot of happiness, health and success in the upcoming year.

Many thanks to everyone who participated in our events and those who watch our activities on social networks such as [Facebook](#) (650 fans), [Twitter](#) (76 pursuing) and [YouTube](#) (48 subscribers, 6.234 views). Finally, I would like to thank all of our partners for their support and cooperation in the media in the previous year.

In the past year, PCTR followed the issue of current security problems in response to the current challenges of domestic and foreign policy. We have organized 17 public lectures and conferences and together with our partners we published professional publications and policy papers. We continued organizing informal club meetings each month and presented a special Newsletter available for download. For more information, see the [PCTR´s press release for 2015](#).

As always, we prepared a summary of events that took place over the past month. Moreover, we would like to invite you to our next event "The Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency in the Middle East" which will take place on January 21, 2016 at 5:30 pm on the premises of the CEVRO Institute.

Yours sincerely,

*Alexandr Vondra
Director*



Events in Euro-Atlantic relations (December 2015)

President of Syria Bashar al-Assad criticized involvement of the West in Syria during his interview for the Czech Television that aired on December 1, 2015. According to Assad, airstrikes of the American-led coalition contribute to reinforcement of the terrorist. By terrorist, the Syrian President meant members of the so-called moderate opposition. Meanwhile, involvement of the foreign powers in Syrian conflict continues. In early December, British Prime Minister David Cameron has succeeded in getting Parliamentary support for air-strikes against the Islamic State (IS) in Syria. As mentioned in our November Newsletter, Germany plans to deploy up to 1200 troops and equipment to support fight against IS. The plan was approved by Bundestag in early December. However, German armed forces will not participate in direct fight. The United States have requested military assistance of Nordic countries in fight against the IS and Saudi Arabia has announced anti-terrorism coalition of 35 Muslim nations. Russia continuously increases its presence in the region – for example, Russians attacked IS targets using missiles from submarine in the Mediterranean Sea. They also deployed significant number of T-90 tanks to back President Assad. The attempts for greater cooperation among participating countries continue as well – Russia and France agreed on sharing military information related to fight against the IS and during his Moscow visit, American Foreign Minister John Kerry appalled on Russia and the USA to find common ground despite difference of opinion on the role for President Assad in Syria.

<http://echo24.cz/a/iKhvY/nebojuju-s-opozici-ale-s-teroristy-mini-asad>,
<http://echo24.cz/a/w26sh/poslanci-zvedli-ruku-a-letouny-vzapeti-poslaly-prvni-bomby-na-is>,
<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/12/16/us-requests-nordic-military-support-fight-against-islamic-state/77418360/>,
<http://www.defensenews.com/story/war-in-syria/2015/12/17/kerry-hints-assad-may-stay-syria-russia-isis/77430660/>

On December 1, 2015 in Brussels, NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed on a plan to sustain Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan during 2016 with the presence of approximately 12 thousand troops. NATO Foreign Ministers also approved funding for Afghan national security forces until the end of 2020. According to the US commander in Afghanistan Gen. John Campbell, an increase in number of troops deployed to the country is needed due to worsening security situation in the region. As was mentioned in our October Newsletter, President Obama decided in October to reverse his decision on withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan and instead he supported an extension of the American mission.

http://www.natoaktual.cz/nato-zustane-v-afghanistanu-d1e-na-zpravy.aspx?c=A151202_180913_na_zpravy_m00,
<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/12/29/gen-john-campbell-afghanistan-taliban-isis/78033970/>

On December 2, 2015 NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs unanimously approved an invitation for Montenegro to start accession talks to join the Alliance. According to Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, it is an important step in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans region. Accession talks will start in early 2016 and once the process is completed Montenegro should become 29th NATO member. However, some Montenegrins protest against the country joining the

Alliance. Russia also strongly disapproves and urges the Montenegrin government to hold a referendum for joining NATO.

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_125370.htm?selectedLocale=en,
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35111009>

Turkey deployed significant number of troops to Iraqi Mosul region in early December of 2015. According to the Turkish government, the aim was to provide assistance to Iraqi armed forces; however, the Iraqi government rejected the presence of Turkish troops. After diplomatic dispute, Turkey decided to stop sending more soldiers to the region but did not withdraw troops that were already deployed. After Iraqi government asked UN Security Council and after some pressure from the USA, Turkey agreed on gradual withdrawal of the troops. In case no diplomatic solution would have been reached, Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs did not rule out subsequent military intervention against Turkey. Meanwhile, the dispute between Turkey and Russia caused by Russian violation of Turkish airspace and subsequent shot down of Russian aircraft continues. Ankara is considering introduction of sanctions against Russia in reaction to Russian sanctions imposed on Turkey. The Russian President Putin then declared that the Russian Federation is ready to act in the toughest way against any targets threatening Russian forces in Syria. The NATO will deploy AWACS reconnaissance planes to Turkey to prevent any additional incident.

<http://echo24.cz/a/wZFL5/hrozi-valka-iraku-s-tureckem-pres-hranici-letaji-silna-slova>,
<http://echo24.cz/a/ifXMF/co-nas-ohrozi-bude-zniceno-putin-pohrozil-turecku>,
http://www.natoaktual.cz/nato-posili-nebe-nad-tureckem-dja-na-zpravy.aspx?c=A151221_150750_na_zpravy_m00

Candidates' campaign to seek the nomination for 2016 presidential election continues in the United States. Donald Trump, currently the leader of Republican polls, reacted to San Bernardino terrorist attack from December 2, 2015 by claiming that he would ban all Muslims from entering the USA. Trump's controversial statement was criticized among others by the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai as well as the Democratic Party primary favorite Hilary Clinton who said that due to such statements, Trump is becoming the ISIS' best recruiter. During the fifth Republican debate which was held on December 15, 2015, Trump's statements were criticized mostly by Jeb Bush who presented one of his best performances so far. Due to recent events, the main topic of the debate was national security. Most visible was a clash between Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio – they disagreed on issues such as powers of the intelligence agencies or future American action in Syria. According to polls from the end of December, the US Senators Cruz and Rubio compete for the runner-up position behind continuously leading Donald Trump. Neurosurgeon Ben Carson fell to the fourth position and Jeb Bush is the fifth. The US Senator from South Carolina Lindsey Graham and the 53rd Governor of New York George Pataki both suspended their campaigns in December. Republican primary race starts by caucuses in Iowa on February 1, 2015.

<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/07/donald-trump-ban-all-muslims-entering-us-san-bernardino-shooting>, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/15/politics/republican-debate-updates/>,

The US Vice President Joe Biden has visited Ukraine on December 7, 2015. Biden has assured Ukrainian leaders that currently growing US cooperation with Russia in the fight against the Islamic State will not threaten American support for the Ukrainian struggle with rebels in the eastern part of the country. According to Biden, the United States will never recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea but on the contrary, Americans will push Russians till peace will be achieved. Vice

President Biden also urged Ukrainian elites to deal with country's economic issues and to restrict corruption and influence of oligarchs over the Ukrainian economy and administration. During meeting with the Ukrainian president Petro Porochenko, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also confirmed Alliance's political and practical support for Ukraine while he insisted on Russian withdrawal from the eastern regions of the country. Ukraine is currently facing increasing violation of ceasefire that was negotiated between the government in Kiev and the rebels. During his press conference on December 17, 2015 the Russian President Putin admitted for the first time the presence of Russians carrying out military tasks in Eastern Ukraine.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/08/world/europe/joe-biden-says-us-is-still-backing-ukraine.html>,
http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_126004.htm?selectedLocale=en,
<http://echo24.cz/a/ibmjg/putinovo-priznani-o-donbasu-jsou-tam-lide-kteri-plni-ukoly>

United Nations Climate Change Conference was held from November 30 to December 12, 2015 in Paris. The Conference was influenced by Paris terrorist attacks from mid-November. Subsequent security measures affected especially scheduled protests against the Conference. As it was mentioned in our November Newsletter, negotiations were complicated by several countries' positions toward possible agreement on reducing greenhouse gas emission. Nevertheless, final agreement was reached. Contrary to previous climate pacts, the new agreement will provide better sharing of information and joint evaluation of each country's plan fulfillment. According to the Paris Agreement, developed countries will financially help the developing countries. The ratification process will start in April 2016. The agreement will enter into force only if 55 countries that produce at least 55 % of the world's greenhouse gas emissions ratify the agreement.

http://www.lidovsky.cz/dohoda-z-parize-ma-udrzet-oteplovani-pod-dvema-stupni-celsia-prq-zpravysvet.aspx?c=A151212_195729_In_zahranici_ELE

As part of the Czech presidency of the Visegrad group (V4) an extraordinary session of V4 Ministers of Defense was held on December 17 in Prague. The main focus of the meeting was the V4 reaction to current migration crisis and also the V4 EU Battlegroup which is going to be on standby from early 2016.

<http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/v4/v-praze-se-kona-mimoradne-zasedani-ministru-obrany-zemi-v4-117901/>

New Poland's government has replaced the head of NATO Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence after Polish military police had raided the facility in Warsaw on the night of December 18, 2015. This is a part of government's attempt to appoint loyal officials to leading administration posts. As was mentioned in our previous Newsletters, Poland and Slovakia agreed on creation of the NATO Counter Intelligence Centre of Excellence in October this year and other NATO member countries are expected to join this new Centre of Excellence as well.

http://www.lidovsky.cz/nova-polska-vlada-vymenila-sefa-polsko-slovenskeho-centra-nato-neuposlechl-prikaz-gkv-zpravysvet.aspx?c=A151218_142231_In_zahranici_ele

As was mentioned in our November Newsletter, the Czech government agreed on an increase in the troops and equipment contribution for the NATO Response Force (NRF). The government proposal was then approved by Chamber of Deputies on December 18. Czech Armed Forces can therefore deploy up to 816 soldiers for NRF in 2016, compared to initial plan for 452 troops deployed.

<http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/poslanci-dnes-schvalili-navyseni-ceske-ucasti-v-silach-rychle-reakce-nato-118079/>

The Czech government has approved new roadmap for the Czech armed forces on December 21, 2015. This new conception anticipates modernization of military equipment, strengthening the numbers of personnel, and enhancing the role of active reserves. In the first stage, the armed forces will stabilize professional soldier numbers and replace outdated technology by the 2020. The second stage will focus on upgrading existing equipment by the 2025. It should be noted that in mid-December, the Czech Parliament already agreed on legislation that will facilitate joining active reserves.

<http://www.mocr.army.cz/informacni-servis/zpravodajstvi/vlada-schvalila-koncepci-vystavby-acr-2025--118119/>

According to opinion poll published by National Democratic Institute on December 21, 2015 most Georgians support Euro-Atlantic aspiration of their country. Total of 58% of respondents prefer European Union to Eurasian Union and 56% of Georgians agree that Georgia will benefit from closer ties with the United States. Despite the support from Georgian general population and political leaders, NATO still does not offer Georgia a Membership Action Plan (MAP). This is probably due to a fear of potential Russian reaction.

<http://georgiatoday.ge/news/2416/NDI-Poll%3A-Georgians-Continue-to-Support-NATO-and-EU-Membership,-Worry-About-Social-Poverty>