

Czech presidency expands EU

By Yoav Cerralbo

Just 15 days into its EU presidency the Czech Republic entered into the world of controversy, not for its vision for the European Union but because of a piece of art.

The massive art installation in the form of a provocative map of Europe gained notoriety, as it was unveiled at a time when the Czech presidency was brokering a cease-fire deal between Hamas and Israel, and working on a resolution that would end the gas problems between Russia and Ukraine.

"Czechs are jokesters in this way and Entropa is a kind of a way to look onto Europe from a humorous point of view and yes, it's understandable some countries can feel this being problematic," said Czech Republic Ambassador Jaroslav Olsa, Jr.

"This is an artistic idea of Europe; it's not the idea of the Czech government. It's a piece of art from the leading Czech artist."

The artist is David Cerny, who is not unfamiliar to controversy.

After the fall of communism Cerny painted one of the landmarks, a Soviet tank on display in Prague, pink.

"It made a big uproar because it was still a national monument although from the communist times but everyone was smiling," said Olsa.

Another of his off-color exploits was holsting an East German manufactured car on stilts, also in the heart of Prague.

"Nobody should be surprised that he is making jokes but at the same time, sometimes they are hard jokes to swallow and it's understandable," said the ambassador.

The creators of the Entropa, a map displaying familiar stereotypes of the 27 member states, said that these images must be recognized before they can be overcome.

The Entropa, while it created



Czech Republic Ambassador Jaroslav Olsa Jr. in front of the official Czech EU presidency logo.

Yoav Cerralbo/The Korea Herald

controversy, did bring to light some of the Czech Republic's platforms for its six-month presidency.

Olsa explained that there are three areas the Czech presidency will concentrate on before it hands over the presidency to Sweden in the summer.

The first is to open up economic barriers inside and outside of the European Union.

"Surprisingly that topic was created before the financial crisis started because for us, it's important to have the European market fully open," he said.

When the European Union grew by 10 countries in 2004 there were various kinds of barriers. For example, Czechs couldn't freely work in various European countries, although they were part of one market.

Working under the motto "Europe without Barriers," the Czech presidency will work to open the borders of every country for its citizens within the Union.

The same goes for free trade

agreements.

Korea and the European Union are currently in talks concerning an FTA which the Czech government highly supports due to its high trade with Korea that stands at about \$1.2 billion.

Furthermore, the European Union is the second largest investor in Korea after China.

"It is increasingly important to have that free movement of goods without barriers," Olsa stressed.

Next is the European Union's relation with the world, something that the Czech government has always taken seriously since the 1920s when the then Czechoslovakian government opened up missions in all parts of the world like Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Jerusalem and Singapore — all cities that had yet to experience an economic and political boom.

The Czech presidency feels that it is important to build close cooperation with neighboring countries so that they can over-

come their various differences.

By using the European Union as an example, where many countries were at odds with each other for centuries over various disputes, those countries put aside their differences for the greater good.

"We overcome many challenges including all the historical problems so we say yes we know that we had many problems in the past but now we have one aim to have a Europe which will be prosperous, visible and democratic."

Olsa emphasized that while the European Union is one, they are still different in language, culture, traditions and geography.

"It is one with many diversities," Olsa pointed out.

Third and probably just as important is the issue of energy security. This is a hot topic considering the events that unfolded between Ukraine and Russia that affected millions of people in Central European countries who rely heavily on Russian gas.

"We saw that type of crisis every year; it's just on a different level," he said. "This year, the scope and scale was significantly different from last year and immediately the Czech Republic started mediating between Ukraine and Russia to help bring gas to Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary, which are almost 100 percent dependant on Russian gas."

The Czech presidency is advocating that the EU should look at alternative delivery routes for member states in Central and Eastern Europe who rely on Russia for its energy solutions.

"We support that the delivery of gas and oil go also by a different route so that European countries are not totally dependant on one supplier."

"That's why it's important to create other kinds of gas supply, for example, via the Caucasus and Turkey, or also the Middle East," he said. "We want to find different ways to deal with this and we don't want to, in a way, be involved in this kind of crisis which is between two countries that are not in the EU and are solving their problems at our cost."

As for the EU's foreign policy under the Czech presidency the plans are the same, to be an effective player in mediating disputes worldwide.

The week they took over the presidency, the Czech foreign minister was on a plane — not to Brussels but the Middle East — to find ways in which a cease fire could be arranged.

The Czech Republic plays an interesting role in this regard because they have long-standing and respectable relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

They have also played an active part as U.N. military observers in places like Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Congo, plus they have increasing overseas development programs in many countries among others include Mongolia to name the closest.

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