

ROLE AND GOALS OF THE DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION
IN PRAGUE IN DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ON THE
EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The European Commission's Delegations are the Commission's diplomatic representations to third countries. Delegations in the associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe are destined one day, upon the latter's accession to the EU, to become Offices in the Community. Delegations in these countries have a number of key functions:

- On a diplomatic and political level, they represent the Commission in the host country and are the channel for day-to-day cooperation between them, with particular emphasis on accession preparations. Moreover, they overlook the implementation of the Association Agreement, which constitutes the legal basis of relations between the EU and the host country.
- They play an important role in the implementation of the Phare Programme and of other forms of EU assistance.
- Last but not least, they fulfill the functions of an information office, providing news and information on the policies and activities of the Commission and, more widely, of the European Union.

The communications task in central Europe is all the more important given the enormous political significance to both the EU and the candidate countries of the integration process and future accession. The need for 'expansion and deepening of information efforts', noted in the conclusions of the European Council of December 1994 in Essen, is all the more important in view of Agenda 2000 and the recently launched EU accession negotiations, whose opening was decided in December 1997, at the European Council in Luxembourg.

The overarching aim of the information and communications task is now to raise awareness throughout Central and Eastern European countries about the EU generally; about what EU membership will mean to, and require of, the countries, peoples and citizens of the region; and the preparations and continued reforms necessary for the countries to assume their responsibilities as future member states and to be able to benefit fully from EU membership.

An Accession Partnership between the Czech Republic and the European Union maps out the progress required of the country as it prepares for the duties of membership. The accession negotiations, together with the concrete challenge laid down by the Accession Partnership, only add to the importance - and complexity - of the Delegation's Communications strategy, the key element of which must be, through clearly defined target groups acting as 'information multipliers', to reach out as widely as possible to people across the country to help them understand the objectives and implications of eventual Czech EU membership, as well as the challenges and potential benefits deriving therefrom for themselves.

The information must be realistic and truthful, and address the concerns of the Czech citizens and different target groups.

In this context it is planned to establish a European Union Information Centre in Prague, which would assume the task of co-ordinating the various EU-related information activities which exist or will be created in the Czech Republic. This Centre should serve as a user-friendly and easily accessible window for use by the general public.

The Information Centre would work mainly on a day-to-day basis providing information to the general public and to specific target groups. Apart from that, the Centre would also cooperate with already existing EU related projects and initiatives and at the same time with other information providers in the Czech Republic, e.g. the European Documentation Centres and the European Information Centres. The Centre will provide information directly, and serve as the first contact point on European Union matters, helping people to obtain more detailed information from other more specialist sources.

It will, for example :

- Co-ordinate existing EU information providers in the Czech Republic
- Provide documents published by the European Union
- Create and update a central database providing information on all existing information sources
- Create a public library, where the visitors of the Centre will have opportunity to follow issues related to the European integration, also via Internet and Europe by Satellite.
- Publish and distribute publications and other materials on the EU in Czech language (for example bimonthly newsletters EuroInfo).
- Organise events for target interest groups