

***International Education Week: Panel Discussion  
The Election from an International Perspective  
The Elliott School of International Affairs  
1957 E St. NW,  
Room 512B  
3:00 – 4:30pm***

**US President-Elect Obama: A Czech Perspective**

- Like many countries in Europe, the Czech Republic views President-Elect Obama as a new page turned in US-European relations. The Czechs are also generally impressed by the agility and creativity of the American electorate which was thought by many to be incapable of such sweeping change.
- A more positive view of the US is also a welcomed development for the Czech government, which views itself as a staunch American ally that was often criticized by fellow Europeans for its support of Bush Administration policies.
- One Czech concern, however, is the future policy of an Obama Administration toward a Third Site for US missile defense in Europe involving a large radar installation in the Czech Republic. There already appears to be some confusion in Poland, which will station the interceptors, following a telephone call between President-elect Obama and Polish President Kaczynski.
- Most US opponents of the Third Site are inclined to seek delaying tactics, and use the argument that the system has not been adequately proven and tested. Thus far, President-Elect Obama seems to concur with this view, which would leave the Czech Republic in a politically vulnerable position.

- As a post-communist country, the Czechs are likewise somewhat concerned that US policy under Obama may not be sufficiently firm toward an increasingly belligerent Russia.
- Overall, however, the new President-Elect has generated hope in the Czech Republic and Central Europe that his charismatic leadership and ability to bring together diverse groups will accelerate global recovery from the recent financial and economic crisis. He is also expected to revitalize multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
- President-elect Obama is seen by most Czechs as being less inclined to employ military solutions to the world's most pressing security challenges. This could provide an opening for the more innovative use of economic and financial measures, as well as personal diplomacy, to resolve these challenges. Should this be the case, it could provide new openings for Czech diplomats as our country is often viewed as a more neutral territory for sensitive multilateral discussions.
- The Czechs to whom I have spoken, are generally optimistic about the future course of the United States, as well as America's image in the world. The set-backs associated with the Iraq conflict, compounded by the more recent global economic downturn, had resulted in some skepticism concerning American leadership that, at least in the near term, will likely be dispelled.
- The Czechs, unlike the US, do not engage in the direct election of their President (through the Electoral College System). Presidential nominees are put forward by the Chamber of Deputies and Senators. A candidate requires an absolute majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (101 Deputies and 41 Senators) to be elected.