

Annual Review April 2001 - April 2002

Dear Members,

Our chamber is now seven years old and I believe continues to make some more excellent progress. All in all we now have 96 company members and 18 individual members, which makes a total of 114 members, an increase from last years 108 of both company and individual members.

We are very pleased to welcome all the new members to our ranks. However we have also regrettably lost a few, some because of the hard business environment and a few because they have lost their Nordic connection. We continue our effort to expand our membership within the other Scandinavian communities and are very happy to welcome our Danish, Finish and Norwegian friends.

In order to make the decision process easier and encourage more companies to join and also to be in line with all other chamber of commerce in the country, we suggest canceling our special entrance fee. In order to reflect both our Nordic membership view and the cancellation of the entrance fee we suggest amending the statues of the chamber presented during the AGM.

I believe that compared to last year, when I stood here and expressed some self-criticism that we had not done enough, we have during the past year succeeded in offering you a great variety. I want to say a few words and then Mr. Birger Husted, our event manager, will in his presentation go into greater detail about this. We always seek new great "events", however, time is our most scarce asset and all board members do this work on a voluntary basis. Therefore, we very much appreciate if you, our members, come forward with suggestions and perhaps also the preparedness to arrange an event.

Last year we started a new sponsored business mixer, which has turned out to be the successes we hoped for. It has resulted in better events as well as more people attending the event and hence become true social gatherings. We of course continue to try to make our members aware of cultural and other initiatives that we feel are worthy of support.

During the past year you have received our Newsletter. Since the rework of its design it keeps receiving a lot of positive criticism and luckily this has also been reflected in the numbers of companies wanting to advertise. We in the board believe that we have her developed a product that we justifiable can be proud of and I want to thank the editorial committee and staff, which have put in tremendous work producing it. In addition we are just now finalizing our Membership Directory 2002. Compared to our last issue 2000 I am happy to say that it looks very much better and I hope you have all supplied your material to it.

In summer 1999, we founded together with the British, Dutch, French and German Chamber of Commerce's the Euro-Czech Forum, in order to have a vehicle through which we could be more proactive on behalf of our members to exchange ideas with the Czech political and community. The Forum was meet with great interest and support from the political establishment, but unfortunately had a bit of a slow start and did initially not

have the impact we searched for.

However, in January of last year we appointed a new Executive Team, lead by Mr. Petr Greger, who previously worked for the EU commission here in Prague. The new team started their work mid March last year and they have so far tackled a range of issues and Mr. Greger presented these in greater detail in his presentation at the AGM.

In April the ECF Board, which I at the moment happen to chair, went to Brussels and meet with Commissioner Verheugen. First of all I want to say that the turmoil this caused in Czech press, mostly positive, is a clear sign that the ECF has established it self as an important communication platform between politic and business.

We there presented a position paper put together by the 5 chambers of commerce united in the ECF. In the position paper we describe our support of the Czech Republic's EU membership together with our concerns regarding the implementation and administrative capacity. The purpose the meeting was to provide the Commission with our point of view concerning the state of legal-business environment in the Czech Republic and our opinions how to prepare for the Internal Market.

The issues we raised are in line with the Czech national interest – we stressed that we want to see the Czech Republic as an equal partner to other Member States after the country accedes to the European Union. The position paper follows the logic of the Commission's Regular Report and is not in contradiction with what the Commission is recommending. It is logical – ECF sees the Commission as the main partner in our effort to help the Czech Republic prepare for EU membership. Our agenda is almost the same as the Agenda of the Commission.

Where we differ is the question whether the current positive tone of the Commission's evaluation does not lead the Czech decision-makers to the limbo. In fact, the most radical reforms have been pushed to the horizon beyond the June elections. I am speaking namely about the reform of bankruptcy, business law, commercial registers or the reform of judiciary in the business context. Nothing has happened at least for three years. The reform of the judiciary is still insufficient and does not target well.

Our plea to the Commission was to constantly remind the Czech Government that in the community of law there is no escape from the fulfilment of obligations of membership. The legal-business environment in the Czech Republic must be reformed before actual accession, otherwise, the Czech Republic will be drawn too often to the European Court of Justice for the failure to meet its obligations.

We wish to see that the Commission's agencies in Brussels and in the Czech Republic support the reform view of the Euro-Czech Forum. Sometimes we hear the opinions that the Czech Republic has achieved almost everything and we feel some reluctance to get engaged in the process of reform persuasion.

The EU businesses need to be able to lean on the Commission and other EU institutions in the case of a problem. We hope that this will be the case in the final period of accession preparation.

Our aim is quite clear – we would like to see the perfect accession for the Czech society and economy. We want to prevent from seeing the picture of the Czech Republic being

drawn through the European Court of Justice for the failure to apply the EC law correctly, due to insufficient administrative and implementation capacity.

We want to see a strong new EU Member State – the Czech Republic. Your chamber currently supports the Euro-Czech Forum with CZK400.000 plus sponsoring by some individual company. However, as presented in last years general annual the forecasted cost for the ECF and agreed to by all other chambers are CZK 650,000 per chamber.

Our reservation last year was due to that we wanted to see how the new executive team performed and then, if well, raise the reminder by voluntary contributions from our members. I can today say that they have without doubt lived up to our expectations, and therefore we have suggested in the budget to raise the contribution by the chamber to CZK 650,000.

The board members would like to express their special gratitude to Ms. Silvie Herink, our Executive Assistant. Without her it would have been impossible to arrange all this and other events. We are also very thankful for the support we receive from Mr. Jan Stocklassa and the rest of his team at the Swedish Trade Council. I would also like to express our gratitude to our honorary Chairman the Swedish Ambassador H.E. Mr. Fälth and the Embassy staff for a good co-operation and their continued interest in our activities.

We do not have an election of board members this year but never the less I would like to present the present board and a few minor changes to it. During last year we have had the pleasure of having Mr. Birger Husted on the board representing our Danish members. Now, Mr. Tom Lindberg from Telenor representing our Norwegian members will also join us. I am very happy that this has happen since it reflects our aim to increase our Nordic profile. We now search for an associated board member representing our Finish members, but so far no one have shown any willingness. In addition Mr. Björn Sjögren from Vattenfall will support us although it is at this moment not sure how long he will remain in the Czech Republic.

From the present board our Treasury Mr. Anders Hall will unfortunately leave us this summer to pursue new opportunities in Sweden and I would like to thank him for his most valuable contribution and wish him all the best for the future.

At last I would like to thank you members for the past year. I hope to see you on our events and that please propose new events! Let us continue to move forward making the Swedish Chamber of Commerce a strong and admired organization in the Czech Republic.

Thank you!

Nils Silfverschiöld
President