

Annual Review April 2003 - April 2004

Dear Members,

We live in an exciting time. Apart from the ice-hockey championship were I personally hope the final will be between Sweden and Denmark.

I have really nothing against the Czech Republic on the contrary; however the expert opinion is that they would be a more difficult opponent;

But it is of course only eight days until the Czech Republic will be a member of the EU.

We all want to congratulate them on this very important step. The Czech Republic, as well as the other former communist ruled countries now joining to finally be part of the integrated Europe were they belong and leave the big shadow of the 20th century behind them is a fantastic event. An event that I bet nobody thought would be possible only 16 years ago.

Hopefully this will ensure peace in our part of the world for the foreseeable future. The Balkans is of course still a cause for certain concern but hopefully at least more or less contained.

Personally I hope that this will be like a second ignition for the business environment. For a number of investors it is surely the removal of the last obstacle.

Without the pressure of the European Union (the Commission) many of the reforms made by the Czech Republic in the last fourteen years would surely not have been made. However as you all know there is still much to do, particularly in the improvement of the legal-business environment, and we will later hear more about this from ECF's Executive Director Mr. Greger.

Our chamber is now nine years old. Although we strive to continuously improve ourselves I also feel that with the resources we have actually reached a very good level and have a vast offering to our members.

Personally I think the one area where we could make some visible improvement would be our web site and Mr. Pech is looking into this. However, it is probably already adequate for our needs and it is questionable if it worthwhile spending a lot of time and money to greatly improve it, however small improvements can sometimes make great difference.

All in all we now have 94 company and 31 individual members, which make a total of 124 members, an increase from last years 123 members. The increase is actually one company. However during the year we have probably cancelled about 10 memberships as well so there has been a larger turnover in the membership than first perceived.

We are very pleased to welcome the new members to our ranks and we regret the ones we have lost. Some ceased to exist and few 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.

I also here want to mention the Nordic Ambassadors lunch which will be held on the 27 of Mai in Hotel Corinthia Towers. For you information all the four ambassadors and the Icelandic General Counsel has said yes.

During the last year a number of events have taken place and I believe we have succeeded in offering you a great variety of topics and speakers.

Tom Lindberg, our event manager, will in his presentation go into greater detail about this and I hope you have noted the extensive list of past events, which Tom has prepared and to which you as members of the Chamber could have participated in.

We always seek new great "events" and to improve from the past. However, as you know time is our most scarce asset and all board members do this work on a voluntary basis.

Therefore, as I say each year, we very much appreciate if you come forward with suggestions. Perhaps you want to make a specific event and are even prepared to sponsor it.

During the last year we didn't make any real business mixer but we have one next Tuesday. Tommy Sjoo has opened a restaurant called HOT in Hotel Jalta on Vaclavske Namesti and there will be some wine tasting and the Swedish-Russian ice-hockey game on a big screen.

I do encourage anybody of our members who would like to arrange an event or an opening/launch of some sort and want the support of the chamber to contact us.

We have of course an extensive contact list and would be happy to inform all our other members about your activities. Hopefully this could lead to some increased business between you.

On June 2 or summer party will take place. We hope it will be as successful as last year. This year the YoYo band, which I hope some of you know, will play for us and this promises to be a great party.

In addition to these pure business and social event we of course continue to try to make our members aware of cultural and other initiatives that we feel worthy of support.

As I announced at last year's annual meeting we intended to make a Membership Directory this year since our last Membership Directory 2002 was so well received.

It is now launched and I hope you have taken a copy it. Personally I think we have further greatly improved it from the last issue and I hope you think the same.

During the past year you have received our Nordic News. As you may have noticed we changed the name from Newsletter to Nordic News last year and from the first issue this year we changed the logo from our Chamber of Commerce logo to the 5 Nordic flags.

This in order to try and reflect that we despite the name, which I personally see absolutely no need changing, try to cater towards the whole Nordic community.

I want to thank the editorial committee and staff for their work on both the Nordic News as well as the Membership Directory. They put in tremendous work producing them and we hope for your continued advertising support.

In summer 1999, we together with the British, Dutch, French and German Chamber of Commerce's founded the Euro-Czech Forum (ECF). This in order for us all to have a synchronized vehicle through which we could be more proactive on behalf of our members to exchange ideas with the Czech political sphere. We, just like the other four, currently supports the ECF with CZK650.000.

ECF has now clearly emerged as the most significant body to express the concerns of the business community (Czech as well as the foreign) and is now a clearly the most respected communication platform between politics and business.

For your information the members of the ECF has made 80% of the foreign direct investments in this country and employ 1.2 million people. Pretty significant numbers no government can afford to ignore.

Mr. Petr Greger, the ECF Executive Director, will present ECF recent activities and future strategy in greater detail in his presentation.

All ECF's events are free of charge. This doesn't however mean that they are unimportant and should not be taken seriously. On the contrary; for instance tomorrow there is an ECF conference in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament with the title "Czech Judges in the European Union", which the ECF does in co-operation with the Vice-chairman of the Constitutional Law Committee Jiri Pospisil and the Union of Judges. A most important event since the judges really is the Achilles heal of the Czech judicial system.

These events might partly seem dry and have very little to do with your respective business. However in order to improve that the Czech Republic will be (since I don't think it is) a true democratic state the judicial system has to be the pillar of society. The small guy on the street must be ensured to get a fair judicial treatment and justice in a fair amount of time just as well as the big business. And in this country we all for sure know how difficult business has it...

In order to improve the legal-business environment it is immensely important that also business people participate in the conversations. How else can you ever expect that there will be any changes in your favour? The judges need the exposure to business arguments. Especially since in this country it sometimes seems to me, Dr. Sramek might not agree, like the lawyers and judges are at war with each other and therefore their discussions isn't always to say the least very productive.

Hence please participate in the activities of the ECF.

The board members would like to express their special gratitude to Mr. Martin Landgren, our Executive Assistant and his co-assistant Maja Lechtman. Without them it would have been impossible to arrange this and other events.

We are also very thankful for the support we receive from Ms. Anna Forsberg and the rest of her team at the Swedish Trade Council.

I would also like to specially express our gratitude to our honorary Chairman the Swedish Ambassador H.E. Mr. Harald Falth and the Embassy staff for a good co-operation and their continued interest in our activities.

The chamber's management board is elected for 2 years at the time and since we had election last year we will not have election until next year again. However last years elected board we unfortunately have lost two members.

Board members slide:

In October Krister Holm left the Board to take up another post within Citibank in the US and in January Anders Grundstomer had to leave the board in order to take up the post as General Manager for Scania in the Netherlands.

I wish to thank them for their contribution and on behalf of the Chamber wish them all the luck in their new positions and countries.

We also have one addition Mr. Ivo Klimeš, Managing Director, Intrum Justitia Czech Republic, and we wish him a warm welcome and look forward to his contribution and good co-operation.

On the board we have the pleasure of having Danish and Norwegian representatives representing our Danish and Norwegian members. We are as I mentioned last and the year before still searching for a board member representing our Finish members, but so far no volunteer has stepped forward.

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 very much!

Nils Silfverschiöld

President