

Czech Republic's new Innovation Strategy impresses the USA

During his visit to the United States of America, Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who is currently chairman of the Council for Research, Development and Innovation (the Council), accompanied by Vice-Chairman of the Council, Karel Havlíček, attended several important meetings also focusing on cooperation in the area of research and innovation. The central theme was presentation of the Czech Republic Innovation Strategy 2019–2030 and the active involvement of American partners in joint projects.

In addition to the main theme of the Prime Minister and his delegation's official visit to the USA which was to meet the President of the USA, Donald Trump, a whole range of other important, special-focus meetings with an immediate effect on Czech research.

The new Innovation Strategy “The Czech Republic: The Country for the Future” was presented in detail both to members of the American Chamber of Commerce and to the most prominent American investors. The agenda for discussion with representatives of top firms IBM, GE, Microsoft, Google, Honeywell, Rockwell, Merck, AT&T, Motorola, Thermo Fischer, Cisco etc. included not only the government's new priorities focused on supporting research, digitalisation and building smart infrastructures, but also the Czech investment policy, combined with investment incentives.



At a meeting with businessmen, the Prime Minister presented the Innovation Strategy “The Czech Republic: The Country for the Future”, 6 March 2019

“I told everyone clearly that only those who intend to finance research and innovation, creating profits in our country as a result, will receive investment incentives. We aren't presenting ourselves as a cheap country, but as a confident partner. The reaction of the American companies was very positive. They greatly appreciated that we have a clear vision. Moreover, most of them already have branches in our country, are familiar with our firms and our universities and are ready to invest in our research environment,” stated the Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš.

Another important meeting took place with the leadership of the management of the **National Science Foundation** (NSF) headed by its director, France A. Córdoba. The NSF is a flagship federal authority which with a budget of 8 billion dollars finances a third of all basic research at American universities. Although it has developed some interesting cooperation with a range of European countries where the NSF co-finances basic research projects, concrete collaboration between our scientific institutions does not occur due to reticence. This was another reason why attention focused mainly on the new methodology for evaluating our science during

presentation of our new innovation strategy. This proved to be decisive and the American side declared it would send the programme directors in agreed scientific fields to the Czech Republic, which gives us the first ever chance of gaining resources from the NSF.

“It was exceedingly difficult to convince the American side that different parameters now apply to evaluation of our research than did a few years ago. We explained in detail the principle of the new Methodology 2017+ which abandons the automatic credit system based on the number of publications and demonstrated that we now evaluate on the basis of qualitative parameters. We intend to direct cooperation at the Czech Republic Grants Agency, the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and at the education department,” added Karel Havlíček, Vice-Chairman of the Council.

An important meeting took place at the **University of Maryland**, one of the leading American schools in the area of artificial intelligence, which was also the central topic of discussion. The University of Maryland has been working in close cooperation with CTU in Prague for many years, specifically with Professor Pěchouček and his team, which will lay the foundations for the planned European Artificial Intelligence Excellence Centre in Prague. Representatives of the Ministry of Defense also attended the meeting, speaking highly of our scientists with regard to their collaboration with the Office of Naval Research, Air Force Research Lab, NASA and the Federal Aviation Administration. Czech scientists collaborate on social simulation projects, machine learning in a hostile environment, cyber security etc.

“The Americans approach cooperation in the area of artificial intelligence from a perspective of both economy and security. The fact that the Prague branch of the Office of Naval Research is the only such branch located in a land-locked country just goes to indicate just how high respect for Czech scientists in this field is. This is very pleasing, because over the next few days we will be signing another strategic agreement for cooperation between the University of Maryland and CTU which fully corresponds to our Innovation Strategy plan,” Karel Havlíček added.

Artificial intelligence, innovation and cyber security were also central themes of meetings with foremost Jewish organisations. The Czech delegation gradually met five such organisations, including the influential **American Israel Public Affairs Committee** (AIPAC). Those attending the meetings also discussed the results of Prime Minister Babiš’s recent visit to Israel involving innovation in agriculture, cooperation with the Start-Up National foundation and supporting Israeli scientists in connection with legalisation of cannabis in the Czech Republic.

The United States also serves as an inspiration for Czech innovation strategy for supporting start-ups, and so the itinerary for the visit included a visit to their flagship – **Incubator 1776. This is a network of dozens of centres for starting entrepreneurs** located nationwide in the United States, making development easier for almost three thousand young entrepreneurs. The Washington branch umbrellas about a hundred micro-firms to whom the Incubator provides office space, mentors, training and shared common equipment and where they can use of state-of-the-art technologies.

“This is a great inspiration for us. Our goal is to launch a national programme via CzechInvest for setting up similar “incubators”, as well as involving the Czech-Moravian Guarantee and Development Bank, which could finance starting projects,” Karel Havlíček commented after his visit to the Incubator.

Source: Office of the Government of the Czech Republic press release | 11. 3. 2019