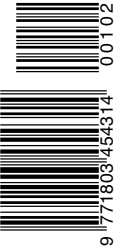


**Rise of a stringer**

How Robert Kallista's RECKord Outside Broadcasting proved all its doubters wrong

**TOP STORY** pages 8-9**Print lives!**

The magazine format was said to be in terminal decline, so how come it's thriving?

**FEATURE** pages 12-13

# Prohibition payout for Becherovka



**Booze ban.** Authorities responded to the poisoning crisis three years ago by taking the unprecedented step of barring all sales of spirits with an alcohol content of more than 20 percent. Here, Makro hypermarket employees in Ostrava close the liquor dept

The three-week clampdown on alcohol sales following the autumn 2012 methanol poisonings left liquor producers counting losses in the hundreds of millions of crowns. Despite initial declarations, none of the manufacturers ever demanded, or received, any compensation. Except one: Becherovka

Dušan Kütner

**P**ernod Ricard-owned Jan Becher, the Karlovy Vary-based maker of the Becherovka herbal bitters, has picked up CZK 96.5m in compensation. The financial award is for damages suffered in relation to the nationwide ban on sales of spirits introduced in September 2012

while investigators went after those responsible for adulterated alcohol that caused several dozen deaths. According to available information, the granting of the money makes Jan Becher the only compensated manufacturer.

However, the sum did not come by way of the state or a domestic commercial insurer.

Continues on **page 5**

# V4 migration summit called

Meeting of prime ministers to address border protection

## FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Marek Schwarzmann

An extraordinary summit of the Visegrad Four (V4) is to assemble in the Czech Republic to tackle the migration crisis.

The 15 February gathering was announced on Twitter by prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka, who has been in talks on the issue with Slovak counterpart Robert Fico. The Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Polish government leaders are set to discuss creating better defences around the passport-free Schengen Area of 26 EU nations. Three days after their meeting, an EU summit on the huge wave of migration will be held.

The last assembling of the V4 government leaders took place in Prague at the beginning of last December. The prime ministers then agreed that all proposals for the creation of a “mini-Schengen” were unacceptable. They also spoke out against other direct or con-



cealed attempts at limiting free movement within the EU.

Representatives of the V4 nations have lately spoken

about a modification of the Schengen space. Czech foreign affairs minister Lubomír Zaorálek (Social Democrat) has

said that Europe must have a Plan B ready in case there is no success in reducing the flow of migrants. The shifting of the

## On the road.

Migrants walk from the Macedonian border into Serbia, near the village of Miratovac

border line which Europe must guard is under consideration, according to him. Most often debated is a “back-up border system” running along a line from Bulgaria to Macedonia, which would effectively eliminate Greece from the Schengen Area. More northerly variants of such a border line do, however, exist.

The interior ministers of the V4 met during January in the Czech Republic, which is currently chairing the four-nation grouping. In a joint memorandum, they again rejected legal quotas for the redistribution of refugees and, as a priority, they called for the fulfilment of the commitment to launch functional detention centres along the EU’s external borderline.



## Ministry’s move allays fears of bridge conspiracy

The mayor of Prague 7 points to the lamentable state of Libeňský most (Libeň bridge) from a boat on the Vltava river. City Hall has for a whole year been working on a repair programme - but critics suspect that it is actually preparing to announce the demolition of the bridge connecting Holešovice district on the left side with Libeň quarter on the right side. The culture ministry has, meanwhile, started the process to have the bridge listed as a monument. While the decision on the listing is being taken, Prague’s city government must treat it as if it already is a registered landmark

## Defence ministry under ‘mortar fire’

Pavel Otto

Instead of promised support for domestic industry, quite the opposite. And, to rub it in, the circumvention of the public procurement law using a NATO supply agency. Such are the main objections addressed to the defence ministry by Czech producers of ammunition for 81-millimetre mortars. The manufacturers are after a three-times postponed CZK 150m contract, which has been made to measure for Spanish rival Expal. They insist that there is no need to buy such materials abroad.

Pardubice-based Explosia and Poličské strojírny in Polička, in Pardubice region, turned to defence minister Martin Stropnický (ANO) in a bid to have the purchase from Expal, mediated by Czech arms trading firm Omnipol, stopped. He responded that he would wait to see whether Expal mortars

priced at CZK 60m – against estimates that they would cost three times less – would be introduced into the country’s armaments. “Only on the basis of this decision will there be an acquiring of ammunition through an open tender, which Czech companies will be able to participate in,” the minister wrote.

It turned out, however, that Stropnický was working with erroneous information. A month before he sent his letter, subordinates had turned to the NATO supply agency, which subsequently addressed their request for an order of 16,000 rounds of ammunition directly to Expal.

The defence ministry press office stood up for the order. The agency was apparently explicitly requested to also approach Czech firms to get the commission fulfilled. But, according to documents at the disposal of E15 daily, it did not do so.

# Matěj Stropnický: Prepare for radical Greens

Pavel Otto

Let's lean more to the left-wing electorate and resign on policies targeted at urban liberals. Such was the change of course announced by new Green Party leader Matěj Stropnický, who says he is giving up on the course pursued by previous leaders Martin Bursík and Ondřej Liška.

Thirty-two-year-old Stropnický defeated Prague 4 mayor Petr Štěpánek to gain the leadership at the Greens' party congress. A deputy to Prague City Hall mayor Adriana Krnáčová until just recently, he has a mandate to lead the Greens for two years, meaning he will bear responsibility for the party's election results in both the regional elections this year and the parliamentary contest next year. Stropnický aims to snatch voters from both the Social Democrats [ČSSD] and ANO, the party that heads the defence ministry through Stropnický's father Martin.

The fresh leader of the party that enjoyed relative success in the 2014 local elections reiterated that he is not, and has no desire to be, a centre-ground politician. "The Greens are a radical party. We must replace



Photo: ČTK

**Close call.** "[US President G W] Bush and [Czech President] Klaus also only just won their mandates. Unlike either of them, I did not cheat," said the new Green Party leader after the election result declaration

nonchalance with rekindled zeal. We must never again pursue green policies for the rich only. Our policies must be open and accessible to everyone," Stropnický said. His main goal is to see his party represented once more by MPs elected to parliament's lower chamber

and to enter into government. The Green Party lost its last influence in government after the 2009 toppling of PM Mirek Topolánek's cabinet after a ballot of no confidence was held in parliament.

Stropnický beat Štěpánek in the first round of voting by the small margin of 117 votes to 97 of the 222 votes available. A minimum of 112 votes was required to win. The Greens' Prague leader Ondřej Mirovský summed up the differences between the two national party contenders by stating that Stropnický is unable to find common ground with anyone while Štěpánek is able to find agreement with everyone.

But the Greens seem to have opted for the more complicated path when it comes to finding agreements, given that on the positive side they are lured by Stropnický's ability to attract attention as an assembly member at Prague City Hall on the Three-party Coalition's ticket. Last year, Stropnický played a prominent part in the disputes that broke out within the City Hall ruling coalition comprising of ANO, ČSSD and the Three-party Coalition. He was one factor in the coalition's disintegration.



Photo: ČTK

## What a bore!

Viktorie, the biggest tunnel boring machine (TBM) in the Czech Republic, grinds its way through what will be the first of a pair of four-kilometre tunnels near Ejovice, a village in the Pilsen region. The construction of the biggest tunnel project on the Prague-Pilsen rail route will cost CZK 4bn. The transport ministry's 2015 budget spend amounted to a record-breaking CZK 92bn. The greatest share of the funds was invested in the rail network as it had the highest number of projects ready and waiting



Igor Záruba's notebook

## Who'd be an optimist?

The World Bank has markedly cut its global growth forecast. Norway's DNB financial group fears failures in the interbank loans system. Bank of America Merrill Lynch warns that the climate has echoes of the mortgage crisis that sparked the 2008 financial meltdown. And the reason behind all of this? The economic impact of falling oil prices.

A flashing red light is provided by the ABX index. It monitors securities' exposure to subprime mortgages. Analysts see unnerving similarities between the 2007-09 ABX numbers and the bursting of the oil bubble. US house prices collapsed by a third in the three crisis years, while the Brent

Crude oil price has tumbled from June 2015's USD 114/barrel to today's USD 30 - and rock bottom may prove much lower. OPEC is set to continue pumping more oil to try and push rivals out of the game. But shale oil extractors are ever busier, so the oil price may stay stubbornly low. For the others, it's tough luck. Picture this: no credit for borrowers, and lenders calling in their chips, causing a wave of bankruptcies across the economy. What a shame the World Bank warning didn't arrive with a prescription for avoiding this scenario. We might all sleep a little better, or crack the whip in trying to avoid economic doom.



Daniel Novák's notebook

## Welcome to Kocourkov

**Municipal authorities** in Prague's Horní Počernice have decided they don't want an Amazon returned goods depot at an existing storage complex. One might understand the resistance if the locality was a threatened nature reserve filled with rare flowers - but it isn't. So why the opposition to having Amazon there, when the firm's footprint would be a needle in the haystack at this facility, and less than half the size of its new plant in Prague's Dobroviz? Following a similar rejection fiasco in Brno, one wouldn't be surprised if the Amazon folk

started to regret coming to the land of the fictitious and farcical village of Kocourkov.

**Prague's Don Giovanni hotel** has changed hands. The hotel, of course, is said by many architects to represent the very worst building monstrosity seen in the country in modern times. "To build this 50 metres from Franz Kafka's grave [at the New Jewish Cemetery -Ed.]" the late architect Jan Kaplický apparently exclaimed. Perhaps if the new owner is patient, the critics' cries will die down, and the site will become an iconic monument...

E15 weekly

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# Goldman snaps up hotels

Austrian group K+K sells its collection of 10 European hotels, including two in Prague

## REAL ESTATE

Daniel Novák

The European real estate market has seen a big transaction that will impact on two Prague four-star hotels, Central and Fenix. Both were part of the portfolio of 10 hotels operated under the brand K+K, which has been acquired from the Austria-based Koller family by American global investment bank Goldman Sachs and the Highgate Hotels company. The price of the deal has not been disclosed. But according to the information of E15 daily, it amounts to hundreds of millions of euros.

"This transaction, along with inquiries from other potential investors which we have observed lately, indicates raised interest, particularly when it comes to non-European investors looking at the hospitality industry and making efforts to invest in premium tourist destinations, among which Prague surely belongs," said lawyer Libor Prokeš of the Wolf Theiss law firm, which participated in the transaction. The Kollers, known as real

estate magnates, owned and operated the hotels for more than 50 years. It was the brothers Josef and Helmuth Koller who were behind the beginnings of the business back in 1961. Gradually, they grew into a European market player with hotel assets in London, Paris, Vienna, Prague, Barcelona, Budapest and Bucharest, among other locations.

All in all, the 10 hotels boast 1,200 rooms. The Art Nouveau Central in Prague's Hybernská street offers 127 rooms, similarly to the Fenix which is located in Ve Smečkách, a stone's throw from Wenceslas Square.

"This transaction perfectly highlights the current trend for businesses with large portfolios and platforms," said Christoph Härle, CEO EMEA for hotels and hospitality at the JLL financial and professional services consultancy firm.

New York City-headquartered Goldman Sachs, founded in 1869, operates worldwide. Its joint-venture partner, American company Highgate Hotels, is a significant player in the hotel industry, particularly in the US.



Photo: Profimedia.cz

## Part of the package.

The K+K portfolio of hotels sold to the American buyers includes the Art Nouveau Central, a 127-room property found on Prague's Hybernská street



Photo: ČTK

## Plum assignment

A record plum harvest has been recorded by the orchards of liqueur maker Rudolf Jelínek, based in the Moravian Zlín region. The orchards in the Na Těchlově locality have yielded 515 tonnes of fruit. The company plans to continue expanding the acreage of its orchards this year. It is aiming to eventually grow enough plums to satisfy a full third of its fruit consumption from its own resources. The majority of fruit processed by the liqueur maker, amounting to five thousand tonnes a year - most of which is plums - comes from external suppliers. Pictured is a still used to distill fruit into spirits

## Home Credit jumps into startups

Marek Schwarzmann

Consumer loan provider Home Credit says it is plunging head first into startup projects and the testing out of new business models. The strategy involves a cooperation with startup support consultancy Creative Dock, with several joint projects now created outside the standard structures of Home Credit. The loan provider has been pushed into pursuing the new approach by fiercer competition on the loans market linked to an abundance of cheap money and the emergence of new technologies. "Every day we must deal with the possibility of someone sitting in their garage and coming up with a way of making loans easier to access, thus pulling

the rug from underneath our feet," David Bystrzycki, CEO of Home Credit in the Czech Republic, told E15 daily in an interview.

Among the latest innovations, the Vox Populi remote customer service video terminals are said to function quite well while a few other technologies have also attracted attention, such as Kup Najisto [Buy with Confidence], a 'middleman' between e-shops and customers that offers buyers the chance to try out products before purchasing them. The peer2peer money lending service Zonky and the short-term loan service Japonská půjčka [Japanese Loan] are other relative hits. Each of the projects is a business enterprise no older than one or two years.

# Prohibition payout for...

Continued from **page 1**

“Indemnification was provided by a commercial insurer to Pernod Ricard,” Jan Becher CFO Alex Duncanson told E15 daily.

The chief financial officer refrained from providing any further details about the insurance claim and indemnification, citing the confidentiality of such information. It is therefore not known how much the company initially claimed and what proportion of the requested payout it actually received.

An amount approaching CZK 100m corresponds with the dip in revenues suffered by the liqueur maker in the 2012/2013 fiscal year that included the prohibition period. Jan Becher posted revenues of CZK 1.21bn for 2012/2013, CZK 110m below the previous fiscal year’s result. The ban on the sale of spirits containing more than 20 percent alcohol by volume impacted Jan Becher’s profits as well, causing a 2012/2013 slump of almost CZK 70m to CZK 142m.

The government put the ban in place in response to the then growing number of deaths



## Can't be too careful.

In September 2012, health officials and police were scrutinising liquor products in stores up and down the country

caused by alcoholic beverages made with extreme volumes of toxic methanol as a substitute product. More than 50 people died, while others went blind or suffered other permanent ill-effects. The key players in the affair subsequently faced trial.

Several countries, including Slovakia, Poland and Russia, banned imports of Czech liquor for several months, affecting producers throughout the Czech Republic. Although they initially contemplated demanding compensation from the state, none actually went as far as that. “Based on a dis-

cussion conducted within the Union of Liquor Manufacturers and Importers [UVDL], a legal analysis, and a discussion with the finance ministry, we decided to refrain from claiming compensation,” said Pavel Dvořáček, chairman of the board at Vizovice-based alcoholic drinks maker Jelínek. The liquor makers were also unable to claim indemnification from commercial insurers in the Czech Republic. “Our policy did not cover such an eventuality,” said Pavel Kadlec, director of Granette-Starorežná Prostějov, offering his firm as an example.



Visualisation: geosan development

## Zbuzany awaits its new horizon

Geosan Development is to this summer break ground on a major housing project. Ten apartment buildings boasting a total of 268 flats are to be constructed in Zbuzany, a village on the southwestern outskirts of Prague (a project visualisation is pictured). The overall projected cost of the investment is around CZK 700m, the firm said. The development will account for a rather large share of the locality’s housing stock

### up and down



**Luděk Kostka**  
Managing director, Geosan

The group intends to “sensitively” construct 10 buildings with 268 flats in Zbuzany, a village on Prague’s southwestern outskirts. Costed at CZK 700m, the project is drawing on a UniCredit Bank loan.



**Marc Beuve-Mery**  
Managing director, Jan Becher - Karlovarská Becherovka

The liqueur maker has become the only producer to be compensated for losses caused by the alcohol prohibition introduced after the 2012 methanol poisonings. But the recompense is not from the state. An insurer of parent group Pernod Ricard has paid up.



**Dmitry Medvedev**  
Russian prime minister

Russia could this year spend up to 475 billion roubles (EUR 5.7bn) on supporting its economy and curbing the consequences of the country’s economic crisis. Given the anxiety over the declining state cash reserves, it is only a fifth more than last year.



**Dan Ťok**  
Transport minister

He is trying to persuade Brussels to grant exceptional permission for 64 transport construction projects. Several-year delays loom because of fresh EU environmental impact demands. The accessing of European funds could be hindered.



**Daniel Adamka**  
CEO, Arriva Transport CR

The railway carrier wants its trains to only stop at ‘important’ stations on the Prague-Benešov route. That would make it faster than Czech Railways. And without subsidies!



**Tomáš Budník**  
CEO, O2

The telecoms provider last year saw its net profit swing to CZK 5.1bn, up 45 percent year on year. The company boss attributed the success to a radical organisational overhaul.

# But we're for the people!

Finance minister Babiš evidently does not know the difference between state and public funds



Photo: ČTK



Adéla Čabanová

Opposition MPs have been derisively suggesting that finance minister Andrej Babiš doesn't quite understand the state purse as well as he should. The ANO leader wants to shift the accounts of public insurers – which have a similar status to public firms – to under the treasury's purview. The surpluses would no doubt make the Czech budget look a little better and help to finance the national debt. But for the health insurers, the change would incur extra expenses of tens of millions of crowns for information campaigns about the new

ly wanting," said TOP 09 MP Michal Kučera.

But such arguments appear lost on Babiš. It's as if certain Czech language nuances remain alien to this Slovak politician. Outlining his proposals, Babiš emphasized that the insurers would keep control of the funds, and that it was all merely a question of financial pragmatism. "We wish to replace commercial banks with a state one. Our bank. After all, we are here for the people, aren't we? We all profit from that," he angrily stated.

Those who'll be directly affected by the switch, i.e. the insurance firm representatives, do not view the shift to the state purse as mere accounting and financial pragmatism. In fact most MPs familiar with the import of such a change

its balance sheet with assets it does not own. Moreover, who'd willingly give up the sense of managing one's own financial affairs?

From an accountant's point of view, it may appear that shifting the accounts to the central bank will deliver savings. Estimates suggest the planned expansion of institutions forced to hold accounts there would save hundreds of millions of crowns annually. Along with the health insurers, other public bodies too are caught up in his, such as the clearly upset Railway Infrastructure Administration. But the adage still holds: the state purse should not hold public service sector funds.

Whether the public service healthcare principle is worth trampling on in the name of

**“The ANO leader wants to shift the accounts of public insurers – which have a similar status to public firms – to under state purse control**

system. More crucially, they would lose control over their own finances.

Opponents to the plan have thus been talking up the autonomy of publicly run bodies and the risks of de facto nationalisation and mixing up the public and state sector roles. "I would recommend the minister verify for himself the differences between public and state funds, and who has the respective administrative purviews. I believe that right now such information is sore-

– meaning those on the parliamentary health committee – have voiced the insurers' concerns.

The problem is that legislation gives the finance ministry the right to influence payment deadlines and payment scopes in relation to public bodies' bank accounts. Which some MPs find unacceptable. They propose this power be surrendered in the case of health insurer accounts. But also unacceptable to critics is the sight of the Czech state improving

the savings is something MPs are likely to decide in February. The potential success of the change, carrying clear echoes of the 1948 putsch, even drew words of praise from communist MP Soňa Marková. She gave a public round of applause to Babiš, perceiving a move that would restrict the plurality of health insurance firms. "If this law passes, we can have one insurer here. The KSČM has had this in its manifesto since 2005," she said. Of course, her party is "for the people" too.



Jana Havligerová's political diary

## Wrist slap for Babiš, prattle from Bakala

**The propagandist ANO party** managed to turn on its own leader via its Facebook page. "Andrej Babiš is the most popular politician in the country, but he still has some shortcomings. For example his old-fashioned hairstyle, or poor grasp of Czech." What else can you say to that but "Ano"! These are clearly the only two failings of the otherwise perfect finance minister.

**Not to be outdone** in the self-lauding fat cat newspaper owner stakes, a *Hospodářské noviny* section – given a name which translates as "Dill sauce please" – recently heard from Michaela Bakala, wife of Zdeněk Bakala, the owner of publisher *Economia* (responsible for *Hospodářské noviny*). In the article, Mrs. Bakala discloses how she has formulated a six-month business, travel and social

plan for the family. It wasn't easy, given that the family operates in the Czech Republic, Switzerland, the US and South Africa: "But if I didn't enjoy it, I wouldn't do it." Given Mr. Bakala's role in their demise, one might wonder how those grumbling OKD miners in Ostrava would react to that...

**At the party's annual conference**, Matěj Stropnický, new chairman of the Greens, tried to explain why he voted for Miloš Zeman in the last presidential election. Why? Because, he said, he rejects all politicians and policies which target the weakest in society. But Zeman, too, has failed in the role of a statesman, added Stropnický. And so the Greens must set about finding someone to defeat the president in the next election. How old will the young Stropnický be by 2018? Still only 35.

joke



"This restaurant has an app that lets you download parmesan cheese from the cloud!"

# City relieved by UK interest rate decision

Unlike the US Fed, the Bank of England remains bearish on the prospect of a rise

Michal Zámečník



Bank of England governor Mark Carney last week reaffirmed his position that the UK base interest rate should

“The cause of the events did not originate in Washington,” he stated. The rate decision met with praise across London’s Square Mile, where financial people had worried about the impact of a hurried rate rise. Unlike his US counterpart Janet Yellen, Carney reiterated the need for caution.

going falls in the oil price; and nervousness about potential volatility and more restrictive financial conditions that might stem from the American monetary policy tightening.

China received particular mention in Carney’s speech. He noted that “risks are shifting from advanced to emerging

“The rate decision met with praise across London’s Square Mile, where financial people had worried about the impact of a hurried rate rise

remain unchanged. Speaking to parliament’s treasury select committee, Carney said that the US Federal Reserve’s decision to edge up interest rates last month had “made a contribution” to the renewed market turmoil seen in recent weeks, but he also asserted that it was not the fundamental cause.

The turmoil referred to by Carney has been profound. Global equity markets have endured a hammering, experiencing their worst start to a year on record. Markets, including the British FTSE100, have struggled to cope with ongoing angst over the slowdown in emerging markets, particularly China; on

economies”, with the “build-up of debt, principally private debt” in China and other emerging markets, the primary concern. However, the room for central bank policy response is limited by conventional standards (all the usual ‘ammunition’ is just about used up, say observers) and a next financial crisis might have

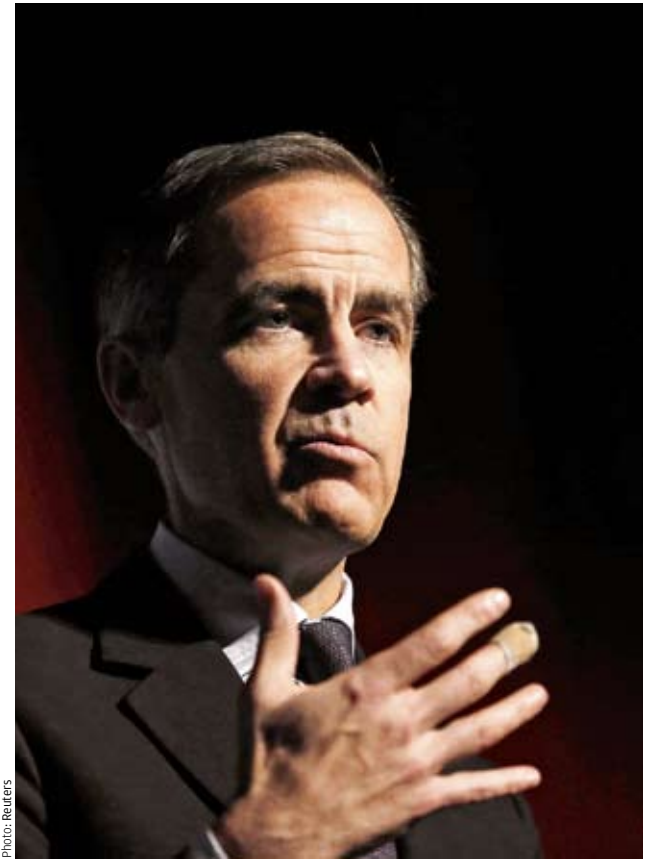


Photo: Reuters

to be addressed with outlandish concepts such as highly negative interest rates (Japan went negative last Friday, surprising markets) and money ‘dumped by helicopter’ into economies.

With such an outlook, only guarded optimism about the world economy’s immediate future is sensible. Events are

reinforcing Carney’s view that now is not the time for the UK to follow the US in reaching for the monetary taps. Indeed, at a time of ultra-low inflation, fiscal tightening and global market turbulence, monetary inactivity seems the right policy. It worked last year, and it would likely work now, too.

# Rare cold snap bewilders East Asia

Excitable meteorologists talked of a ‘polar vortex’. But those chilled to the bone across swathes of East Asia last week didn’t particularly care what it was called, they just prayed for it to end

Oliver Steindler



Thermometers in Inner Mongolia at one point were showing a terrifying -46.8 degrees Celsius (-52 degrees Fahrenheit). Over in Hong Kong, inhabitants were contending with their coldest weather since 1957 at 4C,

and the Chinese city of Guangzhou, noted for its all-year-round warmth and humidity (until now), witnessed snow for the first time since 1967.

Fortunately, the bitterly cold snap – caused by a large mass of air that moved south into East Asia from the Arctic – only glanced through. But that wasn’t much consolation to the many people who lost their lives. According to the BBC, at least 85



Photo: Reuters

of those deaths were in Taiwan where homes typically don’t have central heating. Elderly people experienced heart and breathing problems, with their bodies unable to deal with the dramatic drop in the mercury.

Japanese media reported that Japan’s southern island

of Okinawa saw sleet for the first time ever, and around 100 Japanese were injured in snowstorms. On the South Korean island of Jeju – celebrated for its balmy climate and beaches – a temperature of -6C caused the cancellation of more than 500 domestic and international flights, stranding tourists.

Northern parts of Asia are generally well prepared for a harsh winter with heating systems, but Beijingers were still left reeling by a highly unseasonal -17C. However, organisers of the renowned Harbin International Ice and Snow Sculpture Festival could hardly complain about the chilly “bonus”.

Not so well known is the fact that there are around 57 ski

resorts in China and their number is sharply growing. Many of those fond of winter sports were already heading to the slopes, enthused by the choice of China for the 2022 Winter Olympics. It will take place in Hebei province, close to Beijing, where there are already numerous ski parks pleasing customers. A day ticket at a ski resort such as Wanlong, with 22 kilometres of trails, costs the equivalent of about 137 euro. Entrepreneurs at resorts around the Changbai mountain range, which straddles the Chinese and North Korean border, have also done well amid the icy weather – but tourists may beware of anxieties that a North Korean nuclear test could set off the Mount Paektu volcano.

# On top of the world

**R**obert Kallista began as a journeyman with a video camera. Today he owns the largest outside broadcasting company in the Czech Republic and Slovakia

Petr Horký

The story of Robert Kallista somewhat mirrors that told in the 2014 American noir thriller *Nightcrawler*. The movie follows a freelance reporter, who procures a small van and cheap video camera, and spends his nights staking out the city of Los Angeles. He films everything: crashes, fires, and murder scenes. The juicy shots are then sold to TV stations. *Nightcrawler* ends with the lead character establishing a prospering firm, and able to buy some better equipment – in today's cynical world, footage of suffering is a highly-sought commodity. But unlike the somewhat sociopathic character portrayed by actor Jake Gyllenhaal, Kallista comes across as far more well-rounded.



## Round trip to the Czech Republic.

At first no-one at home was interested in RECKord. Only by proving itself abroad did it open up opportunities with Czech TV stations, mainly for sports broadcasts



Nor is his native Chomutov region anything like California. Indeed, one would hardly expect that a company which helps enable live transmissions of Champions League football and NHL matches, or even concerts by Czech rock group Kabát, operates out of a small northern Bohemian town like Chomutov. Kallista's office suggests that the entrepreneur has already adopted the traits and decor of a successful executive – framed pictures of airplanes hang on the walls, while a small wooden box is filled with cigars. "Piloting aircraft and smoking cigars, those are my two hobbies," laughs the round-faced Kallista.

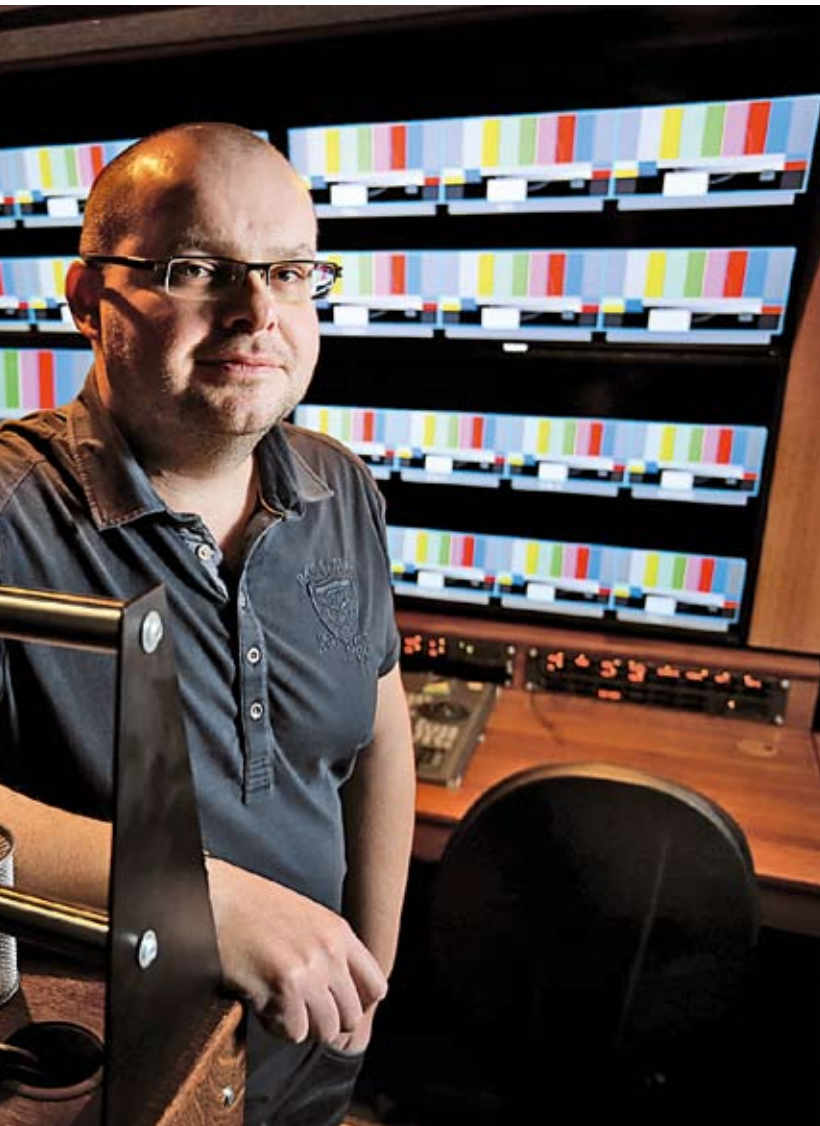
Previously the head of RECKord Outside Broadcasting wanted to be a music producer. While a teenager, Kallista even set about building a recording studio. On the day of his 18th birthday, the entrepreneur registered himself as a self-employed person, dreaming of recording smash hit songs. "We recorded albums, and produced CDs," recalls Kallista. "But I soon realised this was no way for me to make a living. Bands would come for the weekend and think we could make an album with the sound quality of Metallica.

I encountered all kinds of genres, from folk, to big beat, to heavy metal."

## High school dreamer

As soon as Kallista concluded that recording bands was not going to earn him a sufficient living, he tried to utilise his studio for the art of dubbing. But while Prague's top studios could dub a film over a weekend, it ended up taking Kallista weeks. So that was another dead end. Finally, Kallista turned to news reportage.

"I placed some ads in the papers, and people came in from the streets, and became my reporters. We had cameras and a network of newshounds in place. All kinds of events were filmed, from crashes to fires, right through to those cute puppy videos you find at the end of the news. Or even the first snowfall of winter. Someone would call in at 2 am, and off we'd go." Kallista's reporters set about crisscrossing the northern and western areas of Ustí nad Labem and Karlovy Vary, sometimes even hopping over the Ore Mountains [Krušné hory] into neighbouring Germany. "For example, once some nutcase in Erfurt entered a high school and shot around



### Tough times.

Robert Kallista built from scratch what is today's number one Czech outside broadcasting technology firm. But now, other competitors are appearing on the horizon, mainly O2

up. "They would ask us how we could possibly cover a live event in Brno if we were from Chomutov. 'We'd do the same as a Prague firm that gets a flat tire,' I replied. 'Change the tire and carry on.'" TV stations usually utilised in-house transmission facilities, or hired the established Prague-based firm ACE, which had four broadcast vehicles at its disposal.

"So no-one wanted us," continues Kallista. "We had a van whose cost I was paying down, and it was impossible to find work in the Czech Republic. We looked around neighbouring countries and found out that viable possibilities existed there. We always tried calling up TV stations. They would then tell us they didn't need us. On the third attempt, however, they at least gave our vehicle a look. Then they tried us out. Building relationships took a long time. In Germany, Kallista's RECKord helped transmit lower-level football and hockey matches. It has also operated in Austria and Poland.

Ultimately, a path via Slovakia led back to the Czech Republic, with Kallista's firm transformed into a seasoned and experienced outfit. And one ready to do fresh battle with the leader in the field, namely ACE. The competition began to panic about the new boy on the bloc. It began offering its services at dumping prices only to bring RECKord to its knees. Ultimately, ACE reps offered Kallista a chance to swallow the bigger fish. And so the Chomutov-based entrepreneur did just that, thus becoming number one in the Czech and Slovak outdoor broadcast business.

Today an expansive garage contains the firm's fleet of seven broadcast trucks, with two boasting mounted satellite dishes. The largest of these is worth more than CZK 100m, and the whole lot has a net worth of more than half a billion crowns. Naturally, all are custom-built, utilising skills otherwise lacking in the Czech Republic. "The most precious commodity is the know-how associated with such a vehicle. Knowing how to outfit it so that it can operate even in extreme conditions. To stay warm in winter and cool in the summer. And to design it in such a way that 25 people are able to work inside at a moment's notice," explains Kallista during a look at one such vehicle. Inside, these vehicles resemble the cockpits of spaceships. The start of January, when we visited RECKord, is maintenance time and all the vans were back at their home base. "Our work is somewhat seasonal. In December, live transmissions end and TV begins showing Mrazík [an old Soviet seasonal fairytale]; and again in July, when chan-

nels begin showing Chalupáři [a 1975 summer holiday TV series]. That's when we carry out maintenance."

### Automatic Champions League choice

On the horizon, as we spoke, was the securing of the transmission of a [since broadcast] interview with Czech president Miloš Zeman. Add to that the European ice-skating championships in Slovakia and a philharmonic concert in Berlin. "The way it works is that they choose us. There are relatively few clients across Europe. The same is true for companies such as ours. There are three similar firms in central Europe. Perhaps 10 in Germany. I think one in Austria. Across Europe: 25 firms." Today, the Chomutov-based RECKord boasts an annual turnover of around CZK 60m, as well as some impressive references. Whenever Champions League matches are held in the Czech Republic, it gains the outside broadcast. And when the NHL preliminaries were played in the Czech Republic, once gain RECKord was contracted. Such events require up to 20 cameras, which Kallista says other Czech companies are simply unable to handle. The firm has also had its fair share of quirky bookings: over the summer it covered orienteering races in Scotland. Both the broadcast van and tens of kilometres of cable had to be hidden in the forest, so as to not tip off the "lost in the wild" competitors that they were nearing the finish.

RECKord has been able to operate in the Czech Republic essentially without competition. But that is slowly changing. Technical equipment is cheap, and most people today can afford video equipment to take shots from their car. For the internet, such budget-level quality is sufficient, but small competitors along these lines are hardly seen as high-quality competition by Kallista. Bigger fish are, however, also appearing.

"Over the summer O2 came to me offering to buy our firm. But what I really think they were after was acquiring our know-how. They chiefly wanted to discover all of our customers and to see our books. They didn't even name a price. They want to build a flotilla for their new sports TV service. They will evidently vie for customers across Europe. We shall see how they do. They want to compete with us. I have gained respect. They have huge capital," says Kallista.

But the northern Bohemian entrepreneur says he is confident about the future. Partly because he built up his business from scratch. From car crashes all the way to the Champions League...

“Over the summer RECKord covered orienteering races in Scotland. Both the broadcast van and tens of kilometres of cable had to be hidden in the forest, so as to not tip off the ‘lost in the wild’ competitors that they were nearing the finish

15 people. So I travelled there to film for four days.”

Along with a number of fellow reporters, Kallista formed a local network selling stories to TV stations, mainly commercial channels Nova and Prima – but sometimes also to public broadcaster Czech Television [ČT]. Indeed, some reporters working at Nova today once served in Kallista's guerilla network as north Bohemia reporters.

Around 2006, the emergence of new TV channels such as Galaxie and ČT 4 Sport brought fresh demand for live

transmission capabilities, especially for sports. And so Kallista, a man always more enthralled by the technical side of production, made the decision to end his news-gathering efforts. "After a while, it just ended up being about corpses on the one hand and cute animals on the other." Instead, the entrepreneur spent CZK 10m putting together his first professional outside broadcasting truck. And then he crossed his fingers...

But the orders failed to materialise. Many TV stations looked down their noses at this northern Bohemian star-

**F**ormer foreign minister Jan Kohout is the founder of the Institut nové hedvábné stezky – or the New Silk Road Institute. He has already convened its first seminar on Czech-Chinese cooperation. But missing at this meeting were members of the influential Smíšená česko čínská komora [the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Commerce] headed by fellow ex-government minister and associate Jaroslav Tvrdík. “Each person addresses the issue of China from a different angle. We have no ambition to tell Czech firms with whom they should cooperate on the Chinese side, or to organise visits and delegations,” explains Kohout, currently serving as advisor to President Zeman on Chinese matters



## JAN KOHOUT

# A diplomat on a silken road

Jan Stuchlík

**Several associations, chambers and companies focused on China already operate in the Czech Republic. How does your New Silk Road Institute differ?**

The main reason for establishing the institute was the Chinese initiative to create a New Silk Road [also known as China's One Belt, One Road Eur-

asian framework; not to be confused with the similar US-formulated New Silk Road Initiative for transit areas across Europe and East Asia –Ed.]. They view this as a long-term global strategy, which will deliver many opportunities for all countries that take part. The Czech Republic should also grab this opportunity. The aim of the institute is to expound the idea of this silk road, not just with regards to China,

but also regarding relations with other Asian countries. The aim is not the direct support of business relations, but the seeking out of opportunities and issues in which the Czech Republic should partake.

**What specific form does such an endeavour take?**

The entire New Silk Road Institute is not yet familiar to the wider public. It

offers up dimensions spanning cultural and educational activities; it will incorporate cooperation between universities and scientific workplaces, and the sphere of modern technology. So it isn't just about representing Chinese firms in the Czech Republic and Czech firms in China. It is also about cooperating in third-party markets, primarily in Central Asia. Right now, things are not yet seen in this way in our country.

**How are you structured?**

Our managing board comprises many members with the appropriate backgrounds. The role of the institute – and it is not a huge role – is in coordinating and utilising those capacities available via our members.

**Former PM Petr Nečas also figures in the institute.**

He was one of the first [politicians] in the country to clearly state that better relations with China were desirable. He also has experience in the energy and technology spheres. During the time that he was premier [2010-13], these spheres underwent considerable development.



## Jan Kohout (54)

From 2002-04 and again in 2008-09, served as assistant to the Czech foreign minister. Also twice ended up serving as foreign minister - the first time in 2009, during the caretaker government of Jan Fischer, and again in 2013 during the caretaker government of Jiří Rusnok. From 2004-08 served as the Czech Republic's permanent representative on EU affairs. In 2011, helped to build the Joint Czech-Chinese Chamber of Commerce, for which he served as president. Kohout left the organisation after two years. Since 2014 he has served as an advisor to president Miloš Zeman on Chinese matters.

### merce, given that you headed this organisation during its first two years of existence?

We are a non-profit organisation. We have no ambition to put together projects and profit from them, like certain chambers. We want to give advice on the kind of direction to go, and activities to undertake. Those that actually set out on these business endeavours should not include us.

### There is a question as to whom the government and president will heed more - Jan Kohout, or Jaroslav Tvrdík [president of the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Commerce].

Everyone approaches this issue from a different angle. Our activities mutually supplement each other. We have no ambition to be telling Czech firms with whom they should cooperate on the Chinese side, or to organise visits and delegations. For that there is the Czech-China Chamber and other similar institutions. We want to seek out fields in which it makes sense to invest energies. Whether business is subsequently conducted via the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, the Chamber of Commerce, the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Commerce, or someone else plays no role in our concept.

### Why did you leave the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Commerce after two years there?

You can't have two strong personalities at the head of one chamber. In companies, too, it happens that two partners get a project up and running, but after a time they start to disagree over the future strategic course. I have very fond memories of my time at the chamber, and along with Jaroslav Tvrdík we managed to carry out a good piece of work. He has now consolidated that by going in one direction, and I have set out on a direction closer to my previous professional career in diplomacy.

Which is why he can bring many incentives and contacts to the table.

### Do you have some kind of stable partner on the Chinese side?

We are hooked up to a network of think tanks spanning 16 central and eastern European countries and Chinese research institutes. On the Chinese side, for example, we cooperate with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, or their Institute for European Studies.

### Who will finance the work of the institute?

We won't be financing projects. These are projects that will come under the resources offered by two new financial institutions - the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank.

### Where does the Czech Republic fit in within the overall New Silk Road concept?

If you look at all the large infrastructure projects set to be built [in China], then you see that the Czech Republic is largely absent. Nor are we even founding members of the AIIB. Which is why as a first step we should seek to become a member. Then we should define infrastructure or energy projects which are worthy of either our attention, or the attention of third-party countries. And then we should help find partners and financing for such projects.

### How do you want to persuade the government to re-evaluate its current

“ We want to give advice on the kind of direction to go, and activities to undertake. Those that actually set out on these business endeavours should not include us.

### view that membership of the AIIB is not in its interests?

If neighbouring countries, such as Austria, or small countries such as Luxembourg, or larger European countries, are all experiencing the benefits of membership, then I don't see a reason why a technologically advanced country like the Czech Republic can also not see the benefits. We want to put pressure on the government to re-assess its current position.

### You also serve as President Zeman's advisor on Chinese matters. What coordination exists between the president's activities and those of the government with regards to China?

There are no contradictions between the two. Similarly to the government, the president is also interested in the Czech Republic becoming a place where investment flows from China. And at the same time, for it to be a place which is perceived as advanced in terms of technology and education, so that from here, Chinese firms could service the entire region. Nor should it merely be a one-way street; the same care should

be given to supporting Czech firms and research institutions as they seek to operate within the Chinese market.

### Presently, the approach of the Czech government towards China, along with overall levels of investment, can be described as somewhat chaotic. Does some kind of targeted strategy exist, according to which both the government and president operate?

Presently, no long-term strategy exists. Right now, the main issue is to normalise fundamental relations with China and to start to find opportunities for both sides. And it is the New Silk Road precisely that could enable our efforts to take on a more strategic form. By comparing interest levels across various fields with our own potential where we should increase our efforts, and where, conversely, our chances are not so great. We want to work on that with the government and non-governmental sector.

### What is your relationship like now with the Joint Czech-China Chamber of Com-

# Print is dead, long live print



## Steadfast.

"Print is the faithful spouse. Ninety-five percent of the money is in print," says Samir Husni, also known as Mr. Magazine

It's as if magazines have survived a clinical death. More titles than ever before line the shelves at newsagents. Quality will be decisive in their future

Michal Půr

When the accolades were last year bestowed upon the world's best digital magazines, the final line-up included Czech weekly Dotyk [Touch], which is distributed to readers' tablet devices. "The direction we took almost three years ago was and still is the correct one," reacted its editor-in-chief Eva Hanáková, before stating that being a technology visionary had brought rewards. Hardly anyone back then would have imagined that Hanáková would just a few months later be putting together a print version of Dotyk. Distinct similarities are found when it comes to the fate of Daniel Balšínek's Echo. Making the move to paper basically saved the publication from extinction, as Balšínek is quick to admit. Czech readers, it seems, have shown that they are no exception to the rule that's holding sway.

"Just go and look at the newsstands. The breadth of what's now on offer is greater than ever before," says Ruth Jamieson, author of *Print is Dead, Long Live Print*. She has worked for several magazines and witnessed first-hand the demise of British music, fashion and culture monthly *The Face* in 2004. It was a time that was overflowing with "sure-fire" forecasts on the imminent end of print media, with publishers switching to online.

## Esoterica rules

Stack, a UK-based subscription service, announced a 78-percent jump in revenues last year, with a 76-percent increase in its number of subscribers. "One reason is that it's really easy to publish your own magazine now," said Jamieson, talking to *The Independent*. "If you have the idea then there are loads of free, or relatively cheap, tools to make it with.

“

Online servers often struggle with the effects of the rapid development of technologies

And then, using social media, you can find contributors and an audience. So in a way the very thing that was supposed to destroy magazines – the internet – is actually helping to revive them. You don't need a big office and lots of money from investors anymore," she added.

Jamieson outlines one principle that must be observed if a print title is to stand a chance. A general fashion or interiors magazine can hardly cut it. Instead, the publication must exploit a seemingly fringe market segment. For Jamieson, the more esoteric, the better. "It needs to have a really pure, original idea. And it needs to know who its audience is and speak to them," she said.

### 'Banner blindness'

Another expert who also forecast the print renaissance is Samir Husni, aka Mr. Magazine. On his website, Launch Monitor, he publishes the number of new magazines launched each month in the US. During the whole of 2015, there were more than 200, bettering the previous year's result and setting a new record in the process. According to Husni, those who abandoned print, lured by the elusive, tantalising promise of digital, are beginning to repent. "Print is the faithful spouse. Ninety-five percent of the money is in print," says Husni.

With a few exceptions, operators of leading news servers in the Czech Republic concur. They are in fact battling break-neck technological advances of the very phenomenon that was supposed to drive their advantage. With website visitors migrating from traditional desktop and laptop computers to smartphones as the device of choice for web browsing, the demands on shrewdly placing advertisements increase. While print readers are exposed to every ad as they leaf through the pages, it is much easier for readers to ignore web-based adverts and thus much more difficult to place smartphone ads. As a result those publishers' marketing departments that can grapple with the challenge are few and far between.

"Banner blindness" is the new English-language term that describes the outcome. However, nothing of the sort can happen where print media are concerned. So media managers of the day no longer make do with being seasoned journalists or economists. They must also incorporate sophisticated psychological skills if they are to succeed.

### Unproductive and unhappy

Alexander Markowetz of the University of Bonn in 2014 launched a smartphone app named Mental. It is designed to track people's behaviour in the use of their smartphones. The app has been downloaded more than 300,000 times and the results it provides are not exactly encouraging for digital media.

The results show that the average Mental app user interacts with their smartphone for around 2.5 hours a day. Markowetz calls such users "homo digitalis", i.e. individuals who experience their lives largely through digital media. It should be pointed out that this is the most important target group for most media.

The duration of the smartphone interaction is nothing horrific in itself.



“Print sales do not amount to what they were in the distant past, and the same goes for print advertising. But it is plain to see that the segment still possesses untapped opportunities

What is a cause for concern, however, is that during those 2.5 hours the user will have displayed 80 "screens", having unlocked their phone almost 60 times. Markowetz fears that this can lead to a "fragmented life of constant interactions, multitasking and switching between different things". According to Attention Restoration Theory, developed in the 1980s, people need about 15 minutes of devoting themselves to an intellectual task before they reach a sufficiently intense mental concentration. Allowing ourselves to be interrupted every 12 minutes means we are never able to get things done properly.

"It leads to a situation where you are both unproductive and unhappy," explains Markowetz, describing such a state of mind as "digital burnout". In this regard, Markowetz compares smartphones to slot machines. Winning on a slot machine releases the motivational hormone dopamine that makes the gambler press the button again. "It is the same mechanism. It's been decorated like email or Tinder or Facebook, but inside it's a slot machine: one button, one surprise, dopamine, whoo-hoo! - let's do it again," adds the assistant professor.

### Back to the print shop

Such "homo digitalis" observations make it clear that it is only a matter of time before advertisers notice this kind of behaviour, with some already having experienced that lightbulb moment. It is also one reason why the initially purely digital Tablet Magazine morphed into a print version too. Tablet has some 1.5 million online readers and sells about 15,000 copies at news outlets. According to Tablet's editor Mark Oppenheimer, online articles reach a far greater audience but only in a largely superficial manner. The print version's impact is much greater.

The list of previously entirely digital media that have in the meantime expanded their portfolios with print periodicals is rather long. It includes CNET, Politico, WebMD and Pitchfork Review. Especially surprising was the sight of CNET, a leading technology website, making the move in 2014. CNET Magazine sports 128 pages, with about 200,000 copies printed every three months. Although it lags behind technology magazine Wired, which boasts 850,000 copies, it is still an exemplary case of print's rebirth. And there is also the rule that articles printed in the magazine are not available on the website.

### Shredded attention spans.

According to Alexander Markowetz, digital media lead us into a fragmented life of constant interactions, multitasking and switching between different things

"This is a project we talked about for a number of years. One thing we saw was that the brand had a lot more potential than we thought it did," said Jim Lanzone, president and CEO of CBS Interactive, CNET's parent.

### Strong bond

Another factor that speaks in favour of print is the return on investment (ROI). It typically exceeds that of digital media. A study conducted by Germany's GfK Panel Services, concluded that print's ROI is 125 percent (every euro invested in print delivers a return on average of €1.25) while TV and digital media reach an ROI of 87 percent.

"Over the years readers establish a strong bond with their pet magazine," says Mickey Gallin of GfK. "Readers often look forward to the next opportunity to spend time with their favourite brands. We think that readers tend to treat magazines as their pals and would be disappointed not to find their favourite brands in them. The reading itself is inseparable from the advertising. Readers simply want to see advertising for those brands whose products or services they use," Gallin explains. In a simplified manner, it could be stated that the quality of a magazine can be judged by the quality of the advertisements in it.

### Indestructible

It is beyond doubt that print sales volumes are lower than what they used to be and that the same goes for advertising. But it is also plain to see that the segment still possesses untapped opportunities. Cinema and radio also suffered considerably when television made its entry yet they are still around. They have relied on their previous decades of experience as well as on occupying space that television simply cannot reach.

In one of his older columns Stuart Thomas likened reading a magazine to listening to a symphony by Beethoven in a concert setting. The reading of online content is perhaps akin to listening to the same symphony replayed by one's mobile phone. Everyone can choose what they prefer. The answer to the question of why do people continue to read print magazines is very simple: because readers are smart.

## À TABLE!

## In plain French

In Dejvice there's a French bistro that's as unpretentious as can be

Petr Holec

New venture à Table may indeed lack frills but it successfully evokes the atmosphere of a rural French restaurant. The simple setup even extends online. à Table does not have a website but its Facebook page perhaps suffices for a small restaurant with a frequently changing menu.

The standard menu at à Table is typically French, beginning with two soups followed by appetisers including cold meats, terrine of the day, cheese, shelled snails in a Burgundy sauce and foie gras – the most expensive starter at 230 crowns.

The choice of mains is also respectable, especially if you enjoy meats and poultry in rich sauces. The veal, pork, beef steak and entrecôte are all recommended but don't overlook the canards! French ducks are reputedly the tastiest in the world and French chefs have accordingly devised some of the best recipes for them. Among other options, à Table offers a classic duck breast and a leg of duck confit served with potatoes roasted in duck fat.

It's especially worth looking out for this restaurant's recurring tributes to French regional cuisine. I could have kicked myself for missing their recent celebration of dishes from Burgundy. Priced at only 630 crowns, it included delicacies such as frog legs in a poulette



#### Magret de canard.

Breast of French mulard duck with a forest fruit sauce



#### Pork cutlet.

Slow roasted with vegetables and homemade mashed potatoes

sauce. It also meant a depletion of some of the restaurant's best Burgundy wines.

Disappointed but retaining high expectations, I ordered the terrine of the day. In this case duck with Armagnac and cranberries served in a pot. The flavoursome terrine was even enough to persuade me to order duck again for the main course. The magret de canard, or duck breast, is served in typical French style. Lean slices of slightly bloody meat are accompanied by a rich sauce along with mashed potatoes seasoned with green pesto and a julienne of fresh vegetables. Sadly, of all these fine ingredients it was the duck that proved to be the weakest link. It really was bloody, as the waitress had promised, but the meat remained somewhat tough and the flavour was undistinguished for such a potentially tasty bird.

After the main course the waitress offered me a dessert but two well prepared French courses were about enough. Although the French are nowadays making their cuisine lighter, their dishes are still generally creamier and denser than their Mediterranean

### The Lowdown

#### à Table!

Mařákova 10  
160 00 Prague 6  
tel.: 211 152 619  
e-mail:  
atablebistro@gmail.com

#### Opening hours

Mon–Fri 7.30 am–23 pm  
Sat 10.00 am–23.00 pm

#### RATING



counterparts. Instead of dessert I opted for an espresso, which is as powerful here as their garlic soup.

It's heartening to see new restaurants opening in Prague's peripheral quarters that can offer high-quality cuisine that is still affordable to most of us. The bill for a three-course dinner with coffee and two glasses of decent French wine came to around 700 crowns. Had I arrived at lunchtime, I could have ordered a main course and a glass of Bordeaux for no more than 200 crowns.



Photo: Zemědělský výzkum Troubsko

**Czech Bee buzzes over to Brussels for award**

A European Bee Award 'silver' medal has been presented to Zemědělský výzkum Troubsko [Agricultural Research, Troubsko] for a laboratory-based bee repopulation project undertaken for the benefit of Czech farmers and gardeners. Representatives of the Czech Bee project - one of 23 such initiatives from across Europe assessed by the contest judges - picked up their award in Brussels. Czech Bee focuses on breeding bee types that are comfortably in tune with Czech nature and help resolve escalating pollination difficulties. The prize, handed over with the participation of Slovak European member of parliament Franc Bogovič, was collected by Jan Nedělník (third from left), the director of the Troubsko research enterprise and deputy chair of the Association of Research Organisations [AVO], along with team members

A161000479

**Investment league looks back on 20 years, launches new guide**

The Association for Foreign Investment (AFI) nonprofit organisation has celebrated 20 years of existence. At an event held in Prague's Žižkov Tower, former AFI chairs looked back on the development of investment and reflected on the evolving standpoints of governments past and present in relation to investment conditions. The gathering also saw the 'christening' of a unique publication, Investors' Guidebook, which provides incoming investors with comprehensive and current information about the Czech investment environment (third from left is AFI founder Jan Amos Havelka and fifth from left is current AFI chair Kamil Blažek). AFI aims to support foreign direct investment and cultivate the Czech entrepreneurial sphere



Photo: AFI

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## picture of the week



Photo: CTK

## Smash hit in the happy ending charts

If Pia Alonzo Wurtzbach still had some doubts over whether the Miss Universe crown was truly hers, the shrieking fans and raining confetti that greeted the Filipino model on her return to Manila must have finally dispelled them. A billion TV viewers gasped last month after an epic blunder in which the pageant host, American comedian Steve Harvey, mistakenly gave the crown to Colombian beauty contestant Ariadna Gutierrez before correcting himself minutes later. City streets were jammed with adoring crowds as Wurtzbach, in a flowing blue-green gown, waved the Philippine flag while perched on a float designed as a replica of the diamond and sapphire crown. The 26-year-old, who told interviewers she dreams of becoming a Filipino Bond girl, was serenaded by ex-president Joseph Estrada

## invitations

**FESTIVAL**  
**Songfest's Year of the Monkey**


Multicultural festival Songfest.cz 2016 celebrates the arrival of the Chinese Year of the Monkey in 10 localities across Bohemia and Moravia from 3-20 February. It offers a diverse programme full of music from around the world. A highlight will be the Monkey King, a traditional show of the Beijing Opera. Songfest peaks at Prague's Palác Akropolis on 13 February.

**CLASSICAL MUSIC**  
**Under the baton of José Cura**


Argentine operatic tenor José Cura for the first time takes the conductor's baton in an event with the Prague Symphony Orchestra at Smetana Hall, Prague Municipal House. On 10 and 11 February, audiences will be treated to compositions by Rachmaninoff, Respighi and Cura himself (Magnificat). The following week, giving master singing courses, Cura, singers and conductors will be devoted to Italian opera.

**MODERN ART**  
**Jiří Hauschka exhibit extended**


An exhibition of works by painter Jiří Hauschka at Prague's Černá Labuť Art & Event Gallery has been extended until 14 February. Hauschka weds realism and a sense for detail with bright expression and intense emotionality. His pictures bustle with colour and evoke stories. This Saturday there will be a viewing-with-commentary in the presence of the painter.

**THEATRE**  
**McEwan's The Cement Garden at Švandovo**


The Cement Garden (1978), a novel by famous English writer and screenwriter Ian McEwan, has been turned into a stage production for the first time outside of the UK. The premiere took place on Saturday at Prague's Švandovo theatre. More performances are scheduled. The dark horror story tells the tale of four suburban siblings. To avoid being taken into care, they hide their mother's corpse in the house cellar and attempt to live on their own.

**EXHIBITION**  
**Free entry at National Gallery**


Prague's National Gallery is celebrating its 220th birthday. From 5-7 February there is free entry to all of its permanent exhibitions. Among these are Medieval Art in Bohemia and Central Europe, European Art from Antiquity to the End of Baroque in Bohemia, The Art of Asia, The Art of Ancient Times and Art of the 20th and 21st Centuries.

Photos: Michal Hančůvský, archive