



Submission No 5

Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation

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HYNEK KMONÍČEK
AMBASSADOR OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Canberra, 18th November 2011

Dear Secretary Brown,

referring to your letter from October, 18 I would like to offer the comments on a few points mentioned

1. geographical location and spread

Australia closed the embassy in Prague following the dissolution of the former Czechoslovakia. Currently, the Czech portfolio is apparently divided between Australian embassies in Vienna and Berlin. This decision was understood as a reflection of a lower economic interest of Australia in Central and Eastern Europe which was the case at that time. Situation has changed dramatically in recent years and it opens the question of re-opening of the Australian Embassy in Prague.

It is in this part of EU where current crisis did not hit and Central European countries are now more or less source of banking reserves for the EU as such. The Australian investment in the Czech Republic reached 560 million of euro just the last year. Prague has a growing community of around 900 Australian citizens living permanently in the Czech Republic plus regular influx of Australian tourists.

The new situation requires, in my opinion, a new thinking about political, economical and consular presence of Australia in the Central Europe where diplomatic representation is located only in 2 German speaking countries.

2. the appropriate level of staffing

Long term experience of our Foreign Ministry is that Embassy should not be smaller than 3 diplomats. Smaller embassies are preoccupied with themselves and their numbers do not allow required flexibility. As one diplomat should be physically with the embassy all the time not to have the office closed, vacation period means for 2 men staff that remaining diplomat cannot travel at the time of the vacation of his colleague. As a result, Embassy is paralyzed for a significant part of a year. With Embassy of 3 diplomats, work is not affected by vacation of one of them.

Thank you very much for your interest in our opinion. While having served twice as a Deputy Foreign Minister of my country I was engaged with the same exercise in the Czech Foreign Ministry and it will be my pleasure to share our experience any time you find it useful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'H' followed by a series of loops and a final horizontal stroke.

Hynek Kmoníček