

# Democratic Transitions: The Way Forward and the Role of the Visegrad Countries

Tuesday, September 17, 2013, 16.30–18.30, Hotel Maximilian, Gallery Room

In cooperation with the International Visegrad Fund

**Opening Remarks:** Karla Wursterová, Khadija Ismayilova, Sabina Dvořáková

**Moderator:** Jiří Schneider

## Discussion centered on whether the Visegrad countries were doing enough, and if aid was effective

The Visegrad Four countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) have stepped up their joint help for countries in transition channeled through the International Visegrad Fund. One of the benefits is that the V4 can make sure their aid does not overlap and is not wasted – they also benefit from higher exposure in Brussels and other international fora.

Many aspects of the transitional aid process were covered. A real concern expressed was that the environment for aiding democratic transition has taken a turn for the worse with the support of human rights increasingly coming under attack from the business community, with warnings that outspoken declarations or aid projects will threaten orders and local jobs.

Some companies simply enjoyed doing business with dictatorships, warned First Deputy Minister at the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs **Jiří Schneider**. *“We have here companies and business people who enjoy this Byzantine way of doing business in this country. This is fantastic for them, there is no competition. I just need to know the right member of the clan. It is better than the European Union because there is no competition,”* he said. *“If there is no counter strategy [against business moves to sacrifice human rights], we will fail and lose support.”*

Journalist **Khadija Ismayilova** bluntly summed up the situation in her country, frequently referred to as being a family-run dictatorship, now headed by current president Ilham Aliyev. *“The good news is that Belarus is no more the worst dictatorship in Europe. The bad news is that Azerbaijan is,”* she said, adding that there are now around 100 political prisoners in her homeland. She worried that the Czech Republic might not be as willing now to speak up against the Azerbaijani regime as under former foreign minister **Karel Schwarzenberg**.