

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT
POLICY

Voluntary - Public

Date: 8/13/2018

GAIN Report Number: EZ1803

Czech Republic

Post: Prague

New Czech Minister of Agriculture Miroslav Toman

Report Categories:

Agricultural Situation

Agriculture in the News

Climate Change/Global Warming/Food Security

Pest/Disease Occurrences

Policy and Program Announcements

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Approved By:

Emily Scott, Agricultural Attaché

Prepared By:

Jana Mikulasova, Agricultural Specialist

Report Highlights:

Miroslav Toman, former President of the Federation of the Food and Drink Industries of the Czech Republic and the Agrarian Chamber of the Czech Republic, became, for the second time, Minister of Agriculture of the Czech Republic. One of his main priorities is the future reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and its financial framework.

On June 27, 2018, Czech President Milos Zeman appointed a new cabinet to be led by Prime Minister (PM) Andrej Babis. Miroslav Toman became the new Minister of Agriculture, replacing Jiri Milek.

The first cabinet that Babis formed in December 2017 did not pass a vote of confidence. His minority cabinet subsequently resigned. Allegations that Babis' agricultural business abused EU agricultural subsidies contributed to lack of confidence and to political uncertainty. Ministers remained in place in the interim caretaker government. The second cabinet formed by Babis won a vote of confidence on July 12, 2018 with a support of the Communist party. This made them closest to power since the fall of the Communist regime in 1989.



Miroslav Toman is not new to the Ministry and holds a strong agricultural background. He graduated from the Czech University of Life Sciences (formerly known as the Czech University of Agriculture) in Prague and started working as livestock specialist on a farm. After having worked in several other agricultural firms and institutions, he was assigned to diplomatic posts in Washington, DC, and in Bratislava, Slovakia, where he served as Commercial Counselor, from 1996 to 2001.

In 2002, he became Deputy Minister of Agriculture and led the EU accession negotiations. In 2006, he left the Ministry, two years after the Czech Republic joined the EU. In 2007, Toman became President of the Federation of the Food and Drink Industries of the Czech Republic (FFDI), where he acted until becoming Minister of Agriculture in Jiri Rusnok's caretaker government in July 2013 – January 2014.

In March 2014, Toman was elected President of the Agrarian Chamber of the Czech Republic, which he led until the next Ag Chamber leadership elections in March 2017. On June 27, 2018, Miroslav Toman became 14th Minister of Agriculture of the Czech Republic.

Interesting to mention is Toman's family background, wherein his father, Zdenek Toman, served as Minister of Agriculture from 1981 – 1983 under the then Communist government. As a member of the Communist Party, he served at several high level political positions, including Deputy Prime Minister.

Main priorities Miroslav Toman presented for his ministerial appointment include:

- Common Agricultural Policy of the EU (CAP)

Toman finds the financial framework post 2020 proposed by the European Commission for CAP unacceptable for the Czech agriculture. According to his statement, it is impossible that the budget for agriculture and food industry in the Czech Republic would be reduced by up to 20 percent.

Toman does not agree with mandatory capping of agricultural payments for large agricultural

businesses. He suggested capping should be voluntary and for some of the payments there should be no cap at all. Individual member states should have more flexibility and power to make decisions on national level in order to be able to react better to national specifics and needs. He would like to reduce bureaucracy and the administrative burden related to CAP for farmers.

- Draught

Toman's priority is securing enough drinking water for citizens and sufficient water supply for energy industry, irrigation, and agrarian sector.

- Bark Beetle

Czech Republic's forests have suffered from bark beetle infestation and its significant negative impact for decades. Minister Toman would like to improve the situation, for example by providing financial aid to the forestry sector.

- Food Quality and Food Safety

Toman would like to address various issues in this area. Specifically, he met with Polish Minister of Agriculture to discuss questionable safety and quality of some products that Polish producers export to the Czech Republic. Latest examples of such products were apples containing pesticides exceeding maximum residue limits, and canned meat with lower meat content than declared on the label.

Other goals of the new Czech Minister of Agriculture include regulation of promotional campaigns in retail stores and establishing of a commission that will conduct an audit of the returning of property to churches.

Some of the food retail chains' promotional campaigns are significantly longer than temporary and tend to sell products for dumping prices. The Ministry of Agriculture see this situation as hurtful for local producers.

The aim of the audit is to inspect whether the state institutions dealing with the restitution claims sufficiently defended the state interests. The churches were returned land and real estate properties that were confiscated during the Communist regime or obtained financial compensations, all in a value exceeding 100 billion CZK (approx. US \$450 million).