

## THE MEDIA BUSINESS

# THE MEDIA BUSINESS; In Prague, a New Daily for English Speakers



By Jane Perlez  
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The first English-language daily newspaper in Eastern Europe since the collapse of Communism is to be introduced on Monday by a young American publisher who has made a name here with a daily fax publication.

The eight-page paper, called The Bohemia Daily Standard, is intended for the growing number of business travelers and resident English-speaking business executives and diplomats in Prague.

The English-language newspaper choices are rationed in East European countries outside Russia. There are two independent weeklies published in English here, The Prague Post and Prognosis, but they do not cover local or foreign news in depth, a niche the new paper hopes to fill. Three English weeklies of varying quality and focus are published in Budapest, and one in Warsaw.

In addition, The International Herald Tribune, The Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal are available daily in Prague, but many English-speaking readers say that these papers do not cover Czech affairs adequately.

"There's a gap of daily news for foreigners," said Erik Best, the publisher of The Bohemia Daily Standard, who has been putting out his fax publication, Fleet Sheet, since 1991. "And there's so much self-censorship in the Czech press that a truly independent paper will be able to say things the Czech press is afraid to say."

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Mr. Best, 32, a graduate of Georgetown University who holds an M.B.A. from the University of North Carolina, said there were many aspects of Czech business life and politics that needed solid reporting.

"People are interested in corruption, and there's a lot going on," he said. "In a place that purports to be Western, they are getting away with third world things and calling themselves Western."

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The banking system, for example, would appear to be a prime target for aggressive news coverage. There have been several bank failures recently, as well as reports of under-the-table payments for loans. "You go to a bank and can get an appraisal on your building that suits you," rather than one based on the market value, he said.

The paper has a start-up editorial staff of 20, including the editor, Francis Harris, a former foreign correspondent for The Daily Telegraph in Britain, and the deputy editor, Peter Green, an American correspondent who covered the war in Bosnia for United Press International. The business editor is Joe Cook, who writes for The Economist from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Reporters include a mixture of young Czechs and foreigners.

The paper's debut comes near the fifth anniversary of the ouster of the Communist regime on Nov. 17, 1989, when Wenceslas Square in Prague was jammed with tens of thousands of Czechs demanding a new Government. To mark the occasion, The Bohemia Daily Standard will run anniversary photographs and an article by President Vaclav Havel.

Mr. Best expressed hope that the paper, which will cost 10 crowns, or about 30 cents, would grow to a circulation of 5,000 to 10,000. Estimates of the number of English-speakers in the Czech Republic range from 10,000 to 25,000. McDonald's and Coca-Cola have signed advertising contracts, Mr. Best said, and DHL, Lufthansa and British Airways bought ads in the preview issue.

Mr. Best said he was the majority owner of the paper and had financial backing from BankAustria.

Fleet Sheet, a one-page English summary of the principal items of financial and political interest that appear in the main Czech newspapers each morning, has a circulation of several hundred, he said. It costs \$750 a year and has become essential reading for non-Czech speakers in senior corporate positions here as well as for investors in London.

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