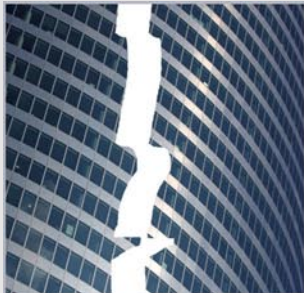


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Not in this EU

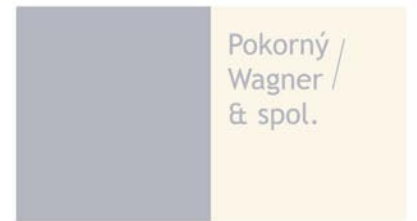


The European Commission shook its finger at the CR yesterday and warned that Prague won't meet the requirement of a maximum 3% budget deficit next year. It's a bit like a parent scolding a child for sneaking a cookie from the jar the parent has just filled with delectable delights. For years, the EU has tolerated, or even encouraged, the CR's profligate spending, burgeoning bureaucracy and look-the-other-way attitude toward light-fingeredness. Otherwise, how could the CR be catching up to the West in these areas so quickly? In fact, if a new EU member tried to cut spending, waste and theft to the bone, the EU would - figuratively speaking - send in the tanks. How nice it would be if Brussels stood up and said, "Damn it, lads, you're growing at 6%, and you've got investors flowing in by the truckload. You should be debt-free and running a 10% budget surplus." Not in this EU, no siree.



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