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Sheriff's in town: Jan Müller took a drastic cut in pay to become the country's main white-collar-crime fighter as head of the fledgling Securities Commission.

Capital markets crusader

■ Securities Commission's Müller tussles with low budget, politics and flu

By Alex Friedrich

Popping cold pills and fighting off the remnants of a vicious flu, Jan Müller was feeling the way the Czech Securities Commission (KCP) looks.

The 30-year-old Elliot Ness of the Czech capital markets, similar to the organization he heads, was having to battle white-collar crime without the strength he needs. With little rest to help him recover, Müller has been helping the understaffed, overworked and underfinanced KCP restructure and reform the country's renegade capital markets.

He's taking his mission almost personally.

While at a conference in London a few years ago, Müller recalled, he had to endure ribbing from foreign colleagues who kept saying, "Hey, a Czech is coming. Put your stuff in a safe so it won't get stolen." They thought if you were Czech, you were a crook.

Ever the determined idealist, Müller took up his 70-hour-a-week, 84,000 Kč-a-month job by leaving a 50-hour-a-week job as custody manager at Commerzbank that paid

nearly twice as much.

Since then, he has lobbied for the establishment of a strong KCP, though Parliament has put a political and financial leash on the watchdog organization.

Its 130 low-paid positions aren't close to the 170 Müller says he needs. Political battles delayed the appointment of the presidium's fourth and fifth commissioners.

Still, by the end of October the KCP had ruled on 350 cases, putting two investment funds and one investment company under forced administration, withdrawing licenses from eight others and imposing more than 116 million Kč (\$3.8 million) in fines.

Now the KCP wants to shake up the entire brokerage sector by forcing it through a relicensing process, one Müller believes could weed out up to 100 firms. Müller has been expecting a furor over the relicensing criteria for general inspection,

but he said it's a key step toward cleaning up the sector.

But will those he has angered try themselves to clean out the KCP? Commission investigators have already suffered several verbal and physical attacks from some of those they've lowered the boom on.

Though Müller said he himself hasn't been targeted, "I guess I'm in partial danger. It's a real jungle out there without any rules."

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