

Address given by Václav Havel to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (Prague, 16 May 2000)

Caption: On 16 May 2000, in an address given in the Czech Parliament, Václav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, emphasises the importance of preparing the country for future accession to the European Union.

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Address Delivered by Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic, to the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (Prague, May 16, 2000)

Honourable Mr. Chairman,
Esteemed Members of the Government,
Esteemed Deputies of the Parliament,

I wish to thank you for giving me the floor and for the opportunity of briefly speaking to you. I would like to say a few words on a highly topical subject, that of bringing our country closer to the European Union. I apologize for possibly speaking of something you may have heard somewhere from me before, yet I feel that we must repeatedly mutually clarify and reiterate certain matters.

First of all, I would like to express my most sincere appreciation to this Chamber of Deputies for its having intensified and accelerated the tempo of our country's legislative alignment with the European Union. I appreciate the fact that you have adopted the amendments to the rules of procedure, which will facilitate the rapid adoption of certain laws. I also appreciate the effective collaboration with the government that you have embarked upon. Forty-eight such valid laws are already in existence; these laws are oriented especially toward unifying our legislation with that of the European Union. Twelve more laws are currently before the Senate, waiting its approval, and I assume that you will adopt still more laws before the Parliament's summer adjournment. These laws are not the only ones in the making; currently under preparation are a whole range of laws intended to introduce various reforms in our country such as reforms of public administration, justice and the law on state administration. All these measures are at varying stages of the legislative process and all of them are extremely important with respect to our approximation to the European Union.

However, the legal wording of the laws and their amendments are one thing, whereas the reality is another matter. We will be evaluated not only on the basis of the wording of the laws adopted, but also according to how we apply these laws, fulfil them and, generally speaking, according to the diverse parameters of our collective life. I believe that it is the task of all of us, including you, our deputies, not only to adopt laws, validate and approve them, propose amendments to them and submit comments on them, but also to do everything in our power to ensure that these laws shall be honoured, applied and respected.

Similarly, we must strive to intensify a truly market environment in the Czech Republic; we must strive to ensure that the courts shall have ever growing authority, that they shall carry out the role incumbent on them in a democratic state, as one of the pillars of democratic statehood. I am convinced that ultimately, despite all the debates, the planned comprehensive, far-reaching reform of our justice, which should contribute to this, will be achieved. Clearly, this means dealing with all cases of corruption and large-scale economic crime. This means upgrading the political standards in our country, upgrading the fundamental principles of decent co-existence among its citizens and decency in public life. I believe that we are doing all of this not merely for the sake of the European Union, which is carefully monitoring and watching all these developments and judging us accordingly, but that we are doing this and must continue doing this, above all for our own sake. In my opinion, this suggests that actually there is no other alternative for us than to strive for membership in the European Union, as this is precisely the road which, for a great many reasons, is the best one for us as well.

Before I conclude, allow me to mention three questions related to the European Union.

Firstly: What is the purpose of this European integration, this immense endeavour, this process? It is my feeling that following the experience of two world wars which occurred in the 20th century, many enlightened Europeans arrived at the conclusion that the entire rich, diversely composed political entity known as Europe must be internally restructured in accordance with new principles. After many long centuries these Europeans opted for the first historical effort to restructure Europe along the principles of true justice, the equality of nations, cooperation and the sharing of common values. This is in fact the first such endeavour to restructure this entity in a way that has never before been done in history. Until now, the most powerful, the mightiest shaped the European order and more or less imposed that order on the less

powerful, the weaker ones. The current effort undoubtedly constitutes the very first attempt to arrange Europe in a different way.

This is an extensive, immense, unprecedented endeavour that is of great historical and political significance, especially in view of the character of the world we are entering at the turn of this millennium. For eminently logical and understandable reasons, alongside all the regional structures, self-administrations and the other structures of a civic society and alongside the national states, large supranational communities are ever more markedly emerging as are various co-states, unions and regional covenants. All these entities form one of those levels upon which Man can identify with himself, yet upon which he can also cooperate with his fellow men. In this I see the European Union's great historical significance, its spiritual, political and historical sense. This Union is not simply a free-trade zone of sorts; it is not merely an association intended to deal with various customs duties, tariffs and the like. Most importantly, it is this great historical endeavour, which - I am convinced - we must repeatedly call to mind and discuss with our fellow citizens.

My second observation is this: Frequently we hear the question - and not merely in the Czech Republic as a candidate country, but also in the Member States of the Union itself - as to whether this integrational process does not efface the countries' national characters, whether it does not impede or eliminate their national identities. I feel that it does not. I feel that what we are surrendering, or what we will surrender, is a piece of our sovereignty. However, only we alone could take away our identity; no one in Brussels or anywhere else could deprive us of it. We alone can decide whether our land shall preserve its traditional character, whether it shall be cultivated and worked, whether our towns and cities shall maintain their historical appearances, whether in our country our specific community life shall thrive, and so on and so forth. All these aspects are the various dimensions of our identity. If anyone is interfering with all of this, then it is we alone, every single day, without even yet being a member of the European Union. It is my impression that the European Union is something that can expand the scope for the implementation of our national identity, should we ourselves wish this, but that it alone cannot deprive us of our identity. We can only destroy it ourselves if we should act short-sightedly.

My final observation is this: Frequently we hear about some sort of omnipotence of Brussels and the Brussels apparatuses; perhaps there is something to this. Often I meet with this viewpoint among the Member States, and even in countries that have been members of the Union from the very outset. Rather than with dissatisfaction over the delegating of various competences and authorities to the European Union centre, I meet with uncertainty as to what is this centre. Is it the European Council, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Commission's apparatus, all those committees or sub-committees? And actually what is this Brussels? In this connection, I believe it is absolutely legitimate and correct that we should participate in the discussions on the European Union's institutional development and institutional reforms. In future, the Union's executive powers will certainly have to be more clearly separated from its legislative powers. Just who will decide the various issues and what form the delegating of decision-making competences shall take among the relevant bodies will have to be further clarified.

It seems to me that it is senseless to feel merely anxious in some way about Brussels' supremacy. What does make sense, however, is to practically, tranquilly and with a certain detachment consider the European Union's institutional composition and to participate in all the deliberations on this composition. The EU's institutions will not change here and now at the Intergovernmental Conference which is currently underway. Certain minor changes will undoubtedly be made there; let us hope that they will be successful and that they will open the road to the further expansion of the European Union. However, these institutional changes will continue to evolve, as life presents us with ever new themes. The entire world will continue to change and develop and, needless to say, this unprecedented endeavour known as the European Union will dynamically advance and, institutionally, will also undergo gradual transformation. Let us be confident, civil participants in this discussion. This, at least, is my feeling supported by numerous experiences primarily from my travels abroad and various meetings with European statesmen who have been visiting us.

My final point is this: In my opinion, the phenomenon of responsibility ranks among Europe's spiritual traditions and among the large assortment of values which, we say, are the common traits defining the European Union as a community of values and traditions that have evolved throughout the centuries. What

does this imply today? I believe that in the coming decades, especially in the coming century and in the long run, this will constitute a major responsibility or co- responsibility for this country's state of affairs, as well as for our civilization - this global and globally interconnected civilization. In the past, Europe assumed this responsibility in an unfortunate way. It perceived it as a forceful exportation of its culture, its religion, its civilizational values to the rest of the world. This was a totally erroneous path. We are entering an era of a multipolarized, multicultural world. Today, Europe should demonstrate its responsibility much more emphatically than up to now by reflecting on the problems and threats to this world and the various dangers hovering over it, and by striving to confront them alone, within its own sphere of existence. Through its own manner of existence, it can propitiously inspire others as well.

This then is my final observation on the enhancement of our country's alignment with the European Union. I wish this Chamber of Deputies much success in the hope that, before the Parliament's summer adjournment, it shall succeed in adopting fine, sound laws that will bring us one step closer to the European Union.

Thank you for your attention.