

Speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic Karel Schwarzenberg at  
the conference „Building Consensus on EU Policies in Support of Democracy”  
March 9, 2009  
Czernin Palace, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this conference dedicated to EU policies in support of democracy. This is a topic of great importance to the Czech Republic, and one that we want to highlight during our Presidency of the EU. The EU has an important role to play in this field, and much international influence. This can be strengthened through building a common approach.

The historic experience has shown that democracy can only survive where it is built on truly vigorous foundations: the rule of law and good governance. Where this basis is missing, our democratisation attempts may end up in deteriorated rather than improved situation. Number of cases around the world can illustrate that the rule of law and good governance are vital for successful democracy. Let me mention one positive example for all: the Masaryk’s Czechoslovakia would certainly be less prosperous were it not founded on the legal framework and solid administrative capacity of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

At the end of the 20th century, conditions seemed promising for the spread of democracy. This was the period that the Czech Republic benefited from. It now looks rather distant. Scholars as well as practitioners now talk about the “backtrack” of global democracy. Doubts are raised about the applicability of democracy in different contexts. Many equate the support of democratic processes with the unacceptable “export” of democracy.

Of course, some doubts are understandable. We always need to keep an open mind concerning our overall mission in the world. And we need to consider whether we are pursuing it in a really coherent way. Democracy is constantly facing new challenges, and these require us to keep our policies under review. This is our responsibility, if we want the EU to remain a key player in strengthening democracy worldwide.

Fortunately, the EU already has at its disposal a great number of policies and instruments designed to support democracy. For that reason, I don't think that there is any pressing need for the EU to create new mechanisms. What we do need is to coordinate and link the different parts of the machine, so as to harness its full potential. Somehow, I think we need to strengthen the link between the various technical or financial instruments and our political activities or declarations. Coherence and consistency are key to ensuring that the EU remains a credible partner.

What this requires is a clear common political commitment. Without this we cannot expect to deliver proper coordination within the EU. That is why the Czech Republic is actively promoting formulation of a European consensus on democracy support. We see this as providing a clear common political commitment, to serve as the basis for EU coordination. The EU has the advantage of being made up of 27 different

models of democracy, each with its own advantages and balance of interests. This range of experience allows the EU to answer different challenges of democracy support in third countries.

The sophistication that this brings to our approach, together with Europe's emphasis on using soft power, make the EU well suited to work in a complementary way with the USA. I am convinced that close cooperation and dynamic equilibrium within the entire transatlantic community is vital if we are to be successful in reaching our objectives.

Many experts and politicians in the EU have recently expressed their belief that a comprehensive approach is vital to building consensus. I agree. The consensus should encompass all relevant EU policies and mechanisms. It should reach across the EU "pillars", to link development policy with the CFSP. This is the direction in which both Czech and Swedish Presidencies are closely working together. This approach should help us to prepare a concept paper on democracy support, leading to Council Conclusions embodying a basis for wider consensus on democracy.

The Czech Presidency is working to strengthen the emphasis on democracy support throughout the CFSP. We also promote democratic governance and the rule of law in development policy, bilateral as well as multilateral. Moreover, for the past five years, the Czech Republic has had a special transition promotion policy aimed specifically at supporting human rights and democracy in various countries. We believe that our own positive experience equips us well to work with others in bringing a better shape to EU policies in this regard. One of the most important elements for us is to tailor support to the specific conditions in the country concerned. We also listen to the needs of local democratic forces, who are closely associated with our activities. The point is to enable every society to find its own expression of democratic principles.

We are convinced that partnership with civil society should be the foundation of EU policy. The reason is obvious: civil society possesses the right expertise, experience and contacts. So it is an efficient ally in implementing policy and providing feedback for its evaluation. Today's conference shows that we are serious in putting that partnership into practice. I believe that it will prove that such a partnership is mutually useful and can be a key to the success of EU policy.

Let me stress once again that it is political commitment that is critical to the realisation of any consensus, including that concerning democracy support. It is important to stimulate and develop commitment, both on the EU side and in the countries concerned. Political will arises not only from values - though it is natural and legitimate for us to refer to promoting European values - but also from particular interests. We have to understand that democracy in the world is in our interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very encouraged by the participation of so many respected experts, civil activists, politicians and diplomats in this room. I am sure you will come up with a lot of inspiration and proposals for our further endeavours. I should like to thank you

in advance for sharing your experiences and creative ideas with us, and assure you that Czech diplomacy will try to make good use of your suggestions.

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