

**Václav Havel: Inauguration of the Conference on Building
Consensus about EU Policies on Democracy Support
Prague, Czernin Palace, 9th of March 2009**

Ladies and gentlemen,
my dear friends,

I would like to make a few remarks regarding the theme of this conference.

As far as we can see, the history of humankind has always been accompanied by the unification and division of States and Empires, which is why there is nothing revolutionary or new about today's Europe trying to build a special union. But what is revolutionary is the way it is achieving it. History shows that until now it was mainly done on battlefields, while nowadays all the differences of interest are extensively discussed in conference halls. Europe had to start two world wars before it was able to obtain such a mode of coexistence of nations and States, and in this respect, the European Union is truly a historically revolutionary event.

The quest for the best way of coexisting has moved from battlefields to conferences, and what does this transfer mean? To achieve it we need ethos, ardour and an ideological base. The history of the European continent was built through the interconnection and the joint evolution of Jewish, Christian and Muslim elements; it went through the Renaissance as well as the Enlightenment. The European Union is thus an attempt to create a common State, which, while respecting the differences of its members, is grounded in the cultural evolution of the European spirit and the common traditions that arose through the centuries, to eventually result in the ideal of human rights. And the expression of this ideology of respect for individual human beings, for their dignity, the ideology of the basic equality of chances, which is often formulated in the documents of the UNO and the European Union, is projected and is practically executed in democracy. That is why we cannot perceive and comprehend democracy only as institutional or technical, presenting itself only through exterior features, but we have to also see in it its spirit, its content. This is a task that even the European Union has to try to fulfill over and over again.

The founder of modern Czechoslovakia, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, said in the 1920s that we might have democracy, but we still lack democrats. Maybe he wanted to point out that which even I consider important and which even modern

politics is attaining – namely the difference between formal democracy and true democracy, which has a spirit and a content, and where the requisites are not only pro forma, not only pretence.

Responsibility – and solidarity as an expression of this responsibility – is an inherent part of the whole set of spiritual values and traditions in which the European Union is grounded. These are two sides of the same coin: the greater the freedom, the bigger the meaning of responsibility becomes. Responsibility means not being indifferent to what is happening all around us, to the events occurring anywhere in today's global civilization. And the European Union still has big reserves not to give precedence to economic interests at the expense of what is fundamental and cardinal, namely the respect of human rights and their fulfillment or, on the contrary, their violation. We cannot be indifferent to what is going on in China, in Russia, to what is occurring in Burma, in Cuba, in Belarus and elsewhere. This doesn't mean we should have hostile relations with the nations of these countries or with their governments, but it means forthrightness as the prime sign of friendship, the ability to discuss openly, tell each other what we like or dislike, what we consider or don't consider dangerous in one's actions, and what, on the other hand, we appreciate.

One of Europe's unfavorable traditions is that of making concessions to evil, of searching for compromise with evil, a tradition of appeasement policy. We saw quite illustratively in modern history that this is what facilitates the way to evil, the way to hell. During the Czech presidency, the European Union should thus highly emphasize what is written in its documents and their preambles, namely that it isn't indifferent to what is going on in the world and that it doesn't intend to make concessions to evil. The EU should repeat it explicitly and it should use simple but eloquent words in documents that substantiate the situation in countries where the violation of human rights is most flagrant, where there are political prisoners, where journalists are murdered, or where citizens are harassed in any way.

Allow me some final remarks, concerning the Czech presidency.

First, I feel it is our lengthy experience with the totalitarian system that obliges us to stress everything that I have been talking about. We lived through it and we know all the cunning and sophisticated methods of repressing human liberties. It is however not the task of the Czech Republic alone, but of all the countries which have lived through this experience, so that they can articulate it, deduce consequences and offer it to others, as a guide for how to face up to modern forms of freedom repressions corresponding to the 21st century.

Second, there is a reason or an aspect which is characteristic for the Czech Republic. Historical European events often became entangled or, on the contrary, disentangled here, wars later spreading outside of our region started here, wars ended here. Whether we like it or not, we are a kind of a geopolitical crossroads in Europe and this status obliges us, particularly during the Czech presidency of the European Union, to be especially sensitive to what I have been talking about, and to urge particularly strongly our partners and friends in the EU that human rights transcend everything else, and that in places where they are repressed, even economic interests, which are often used as arguments and are often given precedence, don't get proper use. Those who look around today's world and get acquainted with the situation must come to the conclusion that what is material is radically affected by what is spiritual.

Dear friends, I hope your conference will be a success and I thank you for your attention.

Edited from a transcript of the speech.