FOIA MARKER

This is not a textual record. This is used as an administrative marker by the Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folder Title:</th>
<th>Czech Republic [4]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Office-Individual:</td>
<td>Speechwriting-Widmer, Edward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original OA/ID Number:</td>
<td>2189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Row:</td>
<td>Section:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Warm greetings to all those gathered in our nation’s capital to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of an independent Czechoslovak state. It is fitting that we should celebrate this anniversary in Washington because it was here that the treaties and agreements that brought Czechoslovakia into being were signed.

The birth of Czechoslovakia in October 1918 was the culmination of centuries of struggle by the Czech and Slovak peoples to gain sovereignty and independence. It was also a testament to the strength of America’s democratic ideals. Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, the drafter of the 1918 Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, was inspired by the American Declaration of 1776. We also recall the role of General Milan Stefanik, the great Slovak compatriot of Masaryk, who served on the Czechoslovak National Council. President Wilson responded to their appeal for independence in his famous 14 Points, and by the end of the same year, the United States became one of the first countries to recognize Czechoslovakia. Following this auspicious start, our relations were disrupted by war and totalitarianism. But after the revolution of 1989, America welcomed Czechoslovakia back into the family of democratic nations and our relations have since deepened.

Today we rejoice that the future has never looked so promising. The blossoming of democratic practices in the Czech Republic over the past four years has led to its invitation to further solidify our relations as NATO allies, and we look forward to independent Slovakia’s ultimate integration into the transatlantic community. I am confident that, as our countries move into the new millennium, our relationship will continue to deepen and grow in strength.

Best wishes to all for a memorable anniversary celebration.

[Signature]
STATEMENT FOR ARRIVAL CEREMONY

Personal Welcome/Remarks About Havel

- Honored to welcome Vaclav Havel (VAHTS-lahf HAH-vell) and Madame Havlova (HAH-vloh-vah) to Washington.

- Havel has led Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic since the end of the Cold War and has overseen the transformation of his country into a flourishing democracy and market economy.

- Want to pay tribute to Havel, known throughout the world for his contributions to democracy and human rights.

- Havel has always fought in defense of free thought and individual responsibility -- from his early days as a poet and writer, to his leadership of the Charter 77 human rights movement, to his negotiations with the Communists in November 1989, which led to Czechoslovakia’s peaceful transformation from communist dictatorship to pluralist democracy.

- Havel has been an inspiration to millions all over world. His name is synonymous with courage in the face of oppression.

- The world owes a great debt to Havel for being one of the great humanists of this century.

General Statement of Bilateral Relationship

- Today, our relations with the Czech Republic are closer and stronger than ever.

- Czech Republic is our partner in consolidating the peace in Bosnia; in stopping the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and in completing the transformation of Europe from divided continent to a prosperous region whole and free.

- And soon we will welcome the Czech Republic as a full-fledged NATO ally.
80th Anniversary of Founding of Czechoslovakia

- 80 years ago the world witnessed the founding of democratic, independent Czechoslovakia.
- U.S. had a seminal role in the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia, a state sadly cut down by the forces of fascism and communism.
- But the experience and love of democracy was never extinguished in the hearts of Havel's countrymen.
- Many see a parallel between the father of Czechoslovak democracy, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk (Gar-REEG MAH-sah-reek), and President Havel.
- Not hard to see why. Both share a vision of a more humane and civilized Europe, built on the foundations of freedom, democracy and individual responsibility.

Agenda of Upcoming Meetings

- Have full agenda with Havel. Reflects our common approach to the many problems facing us.
- We will discuss the process of political and economic reform in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.
- Seek and value Havel's opinion on how this transformation process is developing. He is one of the region's key spokesmen on the issues that are so important in today's post-Communist Europe: tolerance, civility and justice.
- Also talk about issues of particular interest to our two countries.
ID: Havel State Visit: POTUS: Arrival Ceremony Statement

Cleared: EUR: EMalloy
EUR/NCE: JSwigert
D: JBass
P: ERubin
S/P: DHamilton
EUR/PPA: DEmbner
PA: LMcClenny
Havel, True Friend of the U.S.

- President Vaclav Havel has led his country so ably since the end of the Cold War.
- Overseen the orientation of Czechoslovakia and then the Czech Republic into a pluralist democracy and market economy.
- Shaped his country into a true friend, partner and imminent NATO ally of the United States.

Havel, Champion of Democracy and Human Rights

- But we are gathered here to recognize President Havel for more than that. We salute his contributions to democracy and human rights in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Whether you like it not, Mr. President, you are now an icon of democracy and human rights.
- No better person to be the key spokesman and authority on tolerance, civility and justice in post-Communist Europe.
- But his reach is even greater than that. Havel is known throughout the world as a symbol of courage against tyranny, of free thought against mindless conformity, and of humanity against hatred and violence.
- As we celebrate this 80th anniversary year of the founding of democratic and independent Czechoslovakia -- and the strong role played by the United States -- Havel is a symbolic descendant of another great world humanist and the father of Czechoslovak democracy, Thomas Garrigue Masaryk (Gar-REEG MAH-sah-reek).
- The world has a unique and wondrous resource in Vaclav Havel and I ask all of you to join me in recognizing him.

One Last Thing

- Havel has been not only on the political cutting edge but also on the cultural cutting edge -- sometimes bringing the two together in a special creative synergy.
- I mean, who else gets get-well flowers from the Rolling Stones? (Background: Havel was hospitalized in July-
August for follow-up abdominal surgery, and the Stones, which is one of Havel's favorite bands, sent flowers.

Note: When toasting, Czechs say "Na zdravi" (NAH ZDRAH-vee). Means "to your health."
ID: Havel State Visit: POTUS: State Dinner Toast

Cleared: EUR: EMalloy
    EUR/NCE: JSwigert
    D: JBass
    P: ERubin
    S/P: DHamilton
    PA: JReside
    EUR/PPA: DEbner (info)
Dear Susan,

As requested I am sending you copies of the President's speeches that touch upon the topic of a civil society.

Lukáš Martin
Address
by
Václav Havel,
President of the Czech Republic,
on the occasion of
the acceptance of an honorary degree
from Vilnius University, Lithuania

17 April 1996
Mr. President,
Mr. Rector,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me sincere pleasure to speak at this ancient and renowned university which has been for years a focal point of Lithuanian education and a spiritual centre of your nation's long-standing endeavour to cultivate its identity and to express it in independent statehood, serving as a guardian of all the good Lithuanian traditions. By seeking universality in the perception of the affairs of this world, this school has been implementing in a most worthy manner the original meaning of the word 'university'. Moreover, Vilnius University has been a traditional mediator of the knowledge links between the Lithuanian and Czech cultures, fostering good relations between our two peoples. Needless to say, this adds to my delight in being here today.

The collapse of communism, the fall of the Iron Curtain, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar division of the world - all of which were events of truly epochal significance - have given our two nations a similar experience: in the new situation, we are faced by analogous political tasks; I daresay we see the set of challenges which these developments put before the whole present-day world in a similar perspective and with the same sense of urgency. Perhaps I could therefore use this solemn occasion to offer a few general remarks on two of these challenges.

The previous circumstances in our part of the world might well be compared to a shroud of thick, impenetrable and stifling fog hanging over our whole lives. It is now becoming obvious that those who have never experienced this shroud knew little about what was hidden in that fog or behind it; they only knew it was a major social catastrophe that weighed heavily on both individuals and nations and had to be prevented from spreading. We who lived in the shroud knew the effects of this contamination fairly well; as we learned, in a natural endeavour to survive, to move in this strange murky environment we discovered something about its various qualities. And yet our knowledge too was incomplete, limited by the scope of our immediate experience or by the measure of our ability to see or guess what was beyond our discernible horizons.

All of a sudden, with an incredible speed, the fog we used to take as something virtually irremovable dispersed. The air around us brightened and we, as well as those who had lived outside the shroud, suddenly saw an amazingly colourful landscape that had until then remained unseen. We suddenly saw the multitude and diversity of the different peoples that had lived until then under the pall of the uniformity of red stars and communist party secretariats, we could suddenly discern the dissimilarities or affinities between our cultures, the complexities of our history as well as the magnitude of the damage which the totalitarian regimes had done to the people they had ruled. The first moments after such a rapid and radical change were undoubtedly marked by a universal feeling of joy. We were amazed at the beauty of
the world which had until then been hidden from us, surprised at how dazzlingly bright the light of freedom was after decades of a life of greyness and dull monotony, and thrilled at being back in history again once the fog, and with it the state of timelessness, had gone.

The amazement and elation soon passed away and we all found that the world which the fog had for so long concealed from us contained a great deal of surprising, hitherto unthought-of phenomena, novel interrelations, new problems and new tasks. The dispersal of the fog had by no means put an end to all our difficulties. Quite the opposite was true: the principal part of the work was only beginning. Until then, the order of the world was basically founded upon the conviction that the mist would never disperse and that it was therefore necessary to learn to live in it or with it. After its rapid disappearance, an urgent need to build a whole new world became obvious, and this proved to be, in a way, more difficult than the old existence under the fog. At the same time, the scope of the devastation caused by the deadening cloud came into light, and it became clear that it would be immensely difficult to find effective remedies.

We have often heard that neither the West nor the East were prepared for the fall of communism. I would not put it as strongly as that, because I know that life and history would not be what they are if it were within human power to completely predict and plan them and be thus fully prepared for all surprises which they hold for us. Such illusions can be cherished only by total utopians, obsessed by the arrogant belief that they have grasped all the mysteries of the world. Nonetheless, I have a considerable degree of understanding for comments using such harsh words. Time and again, we are confronted with situations which many people had never expected to happen and which they are unable to tackle. To mention just a few: The West certainly rejoiced when we dissolved the Warsaw Pact, an instrument of Soviet hegemony over a greater part of Europe and a menace to the rest of the continent. And yet, for quite a long time, it lacked an unambiguous stand on what kind of a security order Europe should have once that pact was gone. The simple fact that many countries that did not wish to live in a vacuum and wanted to be firmly anchored in the democratic world would quite logically begin to seek membership in NATO was something the West obviously did not foresee at all, which is why it failed to prepare for such a state of affairs in a timely manner at the level of conceptual thinking. Vis-a-vis the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, it was completely at a loss, proving unable even to understand its causes: time and again it was caught unprepared for what happened there afterwards, remaining for a rather long time just a helpless bystander.

But this does not mean that we in our part of the world were prepared any better. We may have known more about certain things which were perceived less clearly from the outside, such as the fact that the Soviet Union was actually one huge jail of many different nationalities. But we have just as helplessly looked on the countless events that accompanied the break-up of the USSR or have resulted from it; not to mention all the tremendously difficult tasks that go with the transformation of our countries into pluralist democracies with a market economy. Often, we have been looking for workable solutions as we have moved along, through trial and error.
clashing again and again with various relics of the past era in the minds of the people as well as in the thinking of society. While everyone yearned for civil liberties and freedom of enterprise, few were aware of the responsibilities this would entail or were able to cope with the need to take care of themselves to a much greater extent than they did before. Similarly, only few of us would have foreseen how easily peoples' natural desire to exercise their identity would be used and abused by a host of new populists or by adherents of authoritarian governance.

I could give you many more examples illustrating the world was ill-prepared for the collapse of communism. I shall not do so, as I see no point in lamenting over why this or that was not done sooner or better or differently or brooding upon various past ifs and buts. It simply happens in history that many things turn out to be different from what we had wished and that the course of events puts before us new tasks time and again. Instead of lamentations, we should rather try to analyze the situation, being bold enough to formulate visions for the future. Being aware that the actual developments may not tally with our expectations, or that what appears to be the best solution at a given moment may prove to be inadequate later, we have to devise, propose and advance new solutions.

Now that I find myself in a country that had to fight more often than many others for the recognition of its national identity and cultural autonomy, the first of the challenges of our time I should like to dwell upon here is the relation between national self-reflection and the so-called civic principle; as I do so, I shall also offer a few remarks on the tasks which face us in this respect.

The identity of a person living today in a democratic society is grounded in the many different types of environment where he or she has roots and the innumerable links which connect him or her with the surroundings. We regard ourselves as part of our family, of our community or region, of a certain spiritual or social environment into which we were born or which we have chosen. We may be affiliated to a group of people whose convictions are similar to our own, such as a political party or a church, we have a sense of belonging to a certain profession and a feeling of solidarity with our colleagues at work. Among all these layers forming our identity, the affiliation to our nation, with all its traditions, its culture and the language of its thought, clearly plays a role of great importance. At present, the concern is to find a new equilibrium among all these affiliations. This is the first major challenge that has emerged before us now that we have regained our freedom. It is certainly not an easy task. It is becoming clear that there are dangers lying in elevating one of our affiliations above all the others and making it the starting point for everything. When that happens, membership in a certain group begins to be seen as something that is more important than a unique human personality, that automatically makes us better than others and that gives us the right to define ourselves in opposition to the others and to treat others as inferiors. We have learned what horrors occur when social and class affiliations, and eventually ideological and political ones, are thus raised above everything else: the result was the concept of dictatorship of the proletariat and, by extension, dictatorship of a party, or rather a party leadership. Raising one's
nationality above all else is no less dangerous - this is where we find the beginnings of nationalism and all the conflicts and atrocities caused by its extreme forms. The same is true of religiosity - the pernicious work of the various fundamentalisms gives telling evidence to the dangers that lie in making religion the one and only priority.

There is, it seems to me, only one principle which can create the proper conditions for the balanced exercise of human identity in all its aspects and dimensions - the civic principle as it has gradually developed in the democratic world, envisaging a civil society. Such a society does not suppress any part of that which anyone of us feels to be, giving to every layer of our identity as much room as it can occupy as long as this does not jeopardize the self-realization of others. That, however, is possible only in an environment that has embraced a certain set of universally binding rules of coexistence, that is, in a state ruled by law and based on respect for human rights in all their diversity, imposing upon the exercise of these rights only such limitations, clearly defined, that are necessary to prevent abuses infringing upon the rights of others. It is not enough to enshrine this concept in laws. It has to be backed by a shared will to respect these laws, a will growing out of a civic culture rooted in a universally accepted moral order.

I trust I have made it clear that I see no contradiction between our commitment to our nation and its identity on the one hand and the civic principle on the other. I believe that the civic principle - when properly interpreted and applied - gives us a better chance to be ourselves also as a nation than could ever be offered by nationalists or those to whom the nationality principle is the highest value of all. The nationalist concepts always contain the tempting, yet insidious offer that we relieve ourselves of the burden of our individual responsibility by delegating all responsibility to our tribe, and thus to its leader. This course of action inevitably leads to the suppression of our freedom, driving us into confrontation with other nations.

All the countries that have rid themselves of communism and Soviet domination are replacing their former centrally planned state-run economies with market economies. There is certainly no need for me to go into detail on the countless problems that come with this historically unprecedented process. Nevertheless, the building of a genuinely civil society of the kind I have just described seems to me even more difficult. It is a matter of nothing less than humanity's own self-comprehension within this world, involving the restoration of values such as a sense of civic responsibility and civic pride, respect for others and for the order of coexistence. Actually, building a civil society means reconstructing in a natural way human or social consciousness - a process which the first Czechoslovak President, T. G. Masaryk, called a "revolution of brains and hearts". Achieving this is certainly much more difficult than, for instance, carrying out privatization. For that matter, even a market economy itself cannot work properly if it is based on a civic consciousness that is not widely shared.
nationality above all else is no less dangerous - this is where we find the beginnings of nationalism and all the conflicts and atrocities caused by its extreme forms. The same is true of religiosity - the pernicious work of the various fundamentalisms gives telling evidence to the dangers that lie in making religion the one and only priority.

There is, it seems to me, only one principle which can create the proper conditions for the balanced exercise of human identity in all its aspects and dimensions - the civic principle as it has gradually developed in the democratic world, envisaging a civil society. Such a society does not suppress any part of that which anyone of us feels to be, giving to every layer of our identity as much room as it can occupy as long as this does not jeopardize the self-realization of others. That, however, is possible only in an environment that has embraced a certain set of universally binding rules of coexistence, that is, in a state ruled by law and based on respect for human rights in all their diversity, imposing upon the exercise of these rights only such limitations, clearly defined, that are necessary to prevent abuses infringing upon the rights of others. It is not enough to enshrine this concept in laws. It has to be backed by a shared will to respect these laws, a will growing out of a civic culture rooted in a universally accepted moral order.

I trust I have made it clear that I see no contradiction between our commitment to our nation and its identity on the one hand and the civic principle on the other. I believe that the civic principle - when properly interpreted and applied - gives us a better chance to be ourselves also as a nation than could ever be offered by nationalists or those to whom the nationality principle is the highest value of all. The nationalist concepts always contain the tempting, yet insidious offer that we relieve ourselves of the burden of our individual responsibility by delegating all responsibility to our tribe, and thus to its leader. This course of action inevitably leads to the suppression of our freedom, driving us into confrontation with other nations.

All the countries that have rid themselves of communism and Soviet domination are replacing their former centrally planned state-run economies with market economies. There is certainly no need for me to go into detail on the countless problems that come with this historically unprecedented process. Nevertheless, the building of a genuinely civil society of the kind I have just described seems to me even more difficult. It is a matter of nothing less than humanity's own self-comprehension within this world, involving the restoration of values such as a sense of civic responsibility and civic pride, respect for others and for the order of coexistence. Actually, building a civil society means reconstructing in a natural way human or social consciousness - a process which the first Czechoslovak President, T. G. Masaryk, called a "revolution of brains and hearts". Achieving this is certainly much more difficult than, for instance, carrying out privatization. For that matter, even a market economy itself cannot work properly if it lacks clear and generally respected rules. It is fairly easy for experienced economists and lawyers to write such rules, especially since there are many time-tested examples to draw on. But economists' or lawyers' compositions alone would not suffice for ensuring that the adopted rules be truly recognized. A genuine respect for them can grow only from a long-standing and systematic cultivation of a social climate in which it can thrive. Which, again, requires a great deal of work in the field of thought.
To my mind, it is in this context that we can identify the roots of most of the adverse or outrightly dangerous phenomena the sum of which is described as the characteristics of post-communism, generating in the Western democratic world a certain amount of mistrust in the relations with our countries. When looking into the depth of all the disquieting phenomena mentioned above we find behind them all, as can be proved by concrete evidence, the same great theme - the need to build a civil society or to restore it after decades of totalitarian rule.

It is my conviction that this is a challenge for all of us, including Lithuania and the Czech Republic, a common task on which we should work together, since it is in our common interest. This task appeared to us in all its urgency only after we had come out of the fog which we had been shrouded in. I will admit that compared with the November days of 1989, when I looked at the hundreds of thousands of people assembled in our squares to demonstrate their desire for freedom and democracy, I now see much more clearly how difficult it really is.

In the initial part of this address I already touched upon a second major challenge which I consider to be worth mentioning here in Lithuania. I am referring to another difficult task: after democracy has won the Cold War against the totalitarian system it should go on now to win the peace as well. This means building speedily and solidly the foundations of a new international order. Though six years have passed since the fall of communism, there has been little progress in this direction. Time is working against us: unless democrats take timely action to establish a new and meaningful order, others - the nationalists, the populists, dictators of all sizes or friends of the old ways - will proceed to build an order of their own, and we shall but stand astounded. Europe, and not only Europe, is now confronted with one of the most significant tasks in its history: it should seek to arrange its political order in a truly natural way, on the basis of respect for the freely demonstrated will of its peoples and cooperation on a footing of equality. It should not allow that the large and powerful ones ever again decide about the fates of the smaller and less powerful without asking the latter's opinion. Throughout its past history Europe, as one single political entity, variegated and multifaceted as it has been, was structured basically according to the wishes and interests of the powerful ones as they were manifested in the outcome of wars or more or less unfair agreements. Its history was thus a history of conflicts into which it more than once drew other continents as well. Now, for the first time ever, Europe has a chance to arrange its affairs differently - so as to radiate peace into the rest of the world and serve as an example of peaceful and effective cooperation of all. The varying interests of European nations and states should never again become a source of confrontations; they should be dealt with through matter-of-fact discussion within a shared democratic environment.

One of the ways - probably the most important one from the long-term perspective - that lead to this ideal consists in the great work of promoting and expanding the European Union. Whenever I have had an opportunity to talk about it, it is the historical and political significance that I have always stressed. I would find it regrettable indeed if, because of the difficulties marking its everyday agenda, the
Union were perceived by the Europeans just as a scene of endless debates on quotas, tariffs or fishing rights. While all these certainly are important issues, they are of a largely technical nature, and it would be most unfortunate if they concealed what should be the cornerstone of the Union: a shared commitment to certain values and a broad-minded endeavour to build on these values a better life for all.

Let me now switch to another topic, one that is, in a number of ways, more urgent, more politically explosive and more controversial than the EU. The solution of this issue may soon show whether Europe is capable of using the great chance it now has and creating favourable preconditions for progress in all the other respects, including furtherance of the European Union. You have probably guessed by now what I am talking about: the European security order linked with the question of enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Let me begin with a more general observation: for the first time in the history of the human race our civilization is a truly global civilization extending throughout the globe. At the same time, however, - possibly because of its global nature - it is marked by an intensified desire of its various cultures or spheres to preserve something of their unique individuality. To my mind, the best alternative for the future development of this civilization lies in the emergence and enhancement of larger regional groupings and in cooperation among them. This is the only way of combining the two contradictory tendencies within our global civilization: on the one hand the pressure of the progressing uniformity, on the other the longing of the various smaller worlds to preserve their identity.

If the world is to go this way it is necessary that the individual groupings draw a clear picture of what they are, how they define themselves and where their borders lie; they, too, have to find their identity. Only if they truly know themselves, realize why they are what they are and are able to define themselves - not against others, but alongside them - will they be in a position to cooperate with the others in meaningful ways and on a footing of equality. Nebulous entities lacking a clear definition and clear borders can hardly engage in creative cooperation with other entities; they would rather tend to quarrel about spheres of influence, dividing lines or conflicting interests. Only those who know and respect their own identity can respect different identities as well. As long as one sphere of our civilization regards other spheres as its adversaries, enemies or rivals, as inferiors or as threats to itself, or simply as entities whose influence should be checked so that its own influence be enhanced, nothing good will come of it. The variety of the wrong alternatives which might grow from this ground is rather wide: it ranges from the possibility of the global Cold War being replaced by numerous new cold wars between different parts of the world up to the worst course of all, the one that political scientists would call a 'conflict of civilizations'. In other words: I am convinced that now that the bipolar division of the world is a thing of the past, we are unmistakably entering a multipolar world, and we should consciously build it as such.

This leads me to another subject, one of a more concrete nature, with a direct impact on the security architecture of Europe and thus on the vital interests of our two republics. I am speaking about the theme of NATO.
I believe that the wider world order I referred to earlier can work and make sense only when it is a natural order, growing out of an authentic and freely manifested will of nations, not a product of designs made on the drawing boards of general staffs of the great powers. In such an order, everyone should enjoy the inalienable right to say for himself where he sees his deepest roots and where he considers himself to belong in terms of his cultural and historical links, his background and the values he may share with others. Respect for his commitment to his chosen community which he manifests by concrete deeds should be seen by all as a sine qua non for the future order to be natural rather than artificial, a stable point of departure for global cooperation rather than a constantly questioned arrangement.

In the Europe of today there is no working democratic defence structure better than NATO. This alliance connects Europe and North America - two continents that share a close relationship derived from their common spiritual traditions, common values and a common political culture. It is a large and strong body whose underlying principles, forbidding aggression, protect the Alliance against possible dangers, no matter where they may come from, and, in so doing, give this grouping an unprecedented internal stability. It is my profound conviction that it should be made possible for all the other European countries which feel they belong to the world enveloped by NATO values, and yet find themselves in a strange vacuum for the time being, to be gradually admitted into the Alliance when they are politically and technically ripe for membership.

We all know that NATO was for a long time first and foremost an instrument used for defence of the free world against a possible expansion of Soviet communism westward. The threat of such expansion is not there any more; therefore, NATO should declare in clear and forceful terms what it is at present: a regional defence alliance prepared to resist any threats, whatever their origin, and, if requested to do so, prevent possible regional conflicts in Europe. A new definition of its mission should not mean changing in any way the Washington Treaty that marked its birth but just the opposite: the Alliance should return to the original letter of this treaty which clearly envisages not only its defence role, but also its openness and readiness to protect the fundamental values shared by its member states.

It is also well known that Russia has increasingly disapproved of NATO enlargement lately. No more than a few years ago Russia did not oppose the enlargement concept, correctly realizing that if the Alliance moved closer to its borders it would bring closer a zone of stability and democracy which would be to Russia's interests as well. What has changed since then? From among the various reasons behind Russia's growing opposition to NATO enlargement, I should like to mention one: a certain hesitation or indecision in the Western approach to this issue. Many in Russia have interpreted this hesitation in their own way: as a recognition of some sort of remnant of the Iron Curtain, as reluctance to enter a territory that was until recently a Russian domain and as an indirect indication that Russia's interests in this territory could still be legitimate. Why, they think, should they not claim their rights when they believe to see signs of acceptance that these rights exist? Thus, it is not only that the West hesitates for fear of arousing Russia's disapproval. It works also the other way round: Russia's disapproval is encouraged by Western hesitation.
The origins of both the former and the latter are the same: the unadmitted or subconscious remains of Cold War thinking, that is, thinking in the category of spheres of influence of the great powers. This amounts to a total lack of understanding for the new situation and its challenges. The West poses no threat to Russia; consequently, Russia has nothing to fear. Russia poses no threat to the West so that the West has no reason for concern either. It is simply necessary to say quite clearly and unambiguously that NATO is a regional grouping of those who consider themselves to be part of the world of its values and that it wants to cooperate with others for the sake of world peace. Russia, for its part, is a huge Euro-Asian power with a great gravitational potential of its own; it has the right to maintain its own identity and to create its own regional links, which it is already doing. Both Western and Russian policies toward each other should be based on the concept of good partnership between these two great entities. This would not isolate Russia from Europe; quite the opposite: a truly authentic and amicable coexistence between Russia and the increasingly integrated Europe is possible and imaginable only if both partners know and respect each other's identity, look for values which bring them together and seek to deepen their relationship on this basis.

Now and then I hear questions as to whether this or that state should belong to the West or the East. These are very wrong questions, for at least two reasons: the first is that it is first and foremost the respective state itself that has the right to decide where it should belong and actually decides about it through its political behaviour, choosing for itself whether it will, for instance, seek membership in NATO or rather in the Commonwealth of Independent States, or whether it will pursue good relations with both bodies without joining either. Nobody is entitled to say which class a state should belong to without regard for that state's own opinion. The second reason why such questions are wrong lies in their undertone which seems to tacitly imply that the West is the better one and the East the worse and that the decision to be made is about who can join the better ones and who will be left with the worse group. Such a perception is again a road to hell. Nobody is a priori worse or a priori better. We are simply different in different ways. South America, gradually embarking upon a course of integration, the countries associated in ASEAN, the vast and still somewhat mysterious China, the Middle East, the NATO countries, Russia and other post-Soviet states that want to have firm security, political and economic links with the Russian Federation - all these are different regions within the world of today that should, in their common interests and in the spirit of certain universal values, work together on a footing of equality. In this cooperation nobody should consider himself better than the others, nobody should have any reason to suspect the others of evil intentions and nobody should arrogate for himself the right to decide for others who should be allowed to join one or another structure and who should not.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me thank you for the attention with which you have listened to me. I also thank you for your warm reception and most of all for the honour you grant me today by bestowing upon me an honorary degree of Vilnius University.
Address
by
Václav Havel,
President of the Czech Republic,
in acceptance of
Honorary Doctorate
from the Technical University of
Dresden

Dresden, Federal Republic of Germany
30 October 1995
Mr. Rector,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The honour bestowed upon me today is of special value to me, as I receive it in a land which has been linked with the fate of my fellow citizens as well as with my own fate more closely than many others. I am not referring only to the very lively neighbourly relations between Bohemia and Saxony of ancient date, but first and foremost to the similarity between the destinies of East Germany and the Czech lands in the twentieth century: though you were a defeated state when Nazism was overthrown and we a victorious one, we were hardly rid of Nazi rule when we both fell for decades under Communist domination. Thus, we both know well indeed what Communism was like and how skilful it was in bending backs and destroying human souls. Once we bated our breath while watching the Berlin Uprising, and likewise, it was with bated breath that you looked at the attempt to humanize Communism in our country in 1968; its suppression, and particularly the fact that the army of the former German Democratic Republic took part in it, was a bitter experience to you. Later, when the various dissident movements came into being in the seventies and eighties, their members in your country as well as in ours felt a profound solidarity for each other. I know there were people in Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin who prayed for me when I was in prison, and I shall always remain grateful to them. Both you and we knew, or at least sensed, that if the Iron Curtain were to fall one day the Berlin Wall was bound to fall as well, and vice versa: if the Wall fell the Iron Curtain would go with it. This is precisely what happened: I shall never forget how the people of Prague brought tea to the citizens of the former GDR camping by the hundreds in the garden of the Prague Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, and how enthusiastically they waved to them when buses took those Germans to West Germany. When I saw this it was clear to me that my country, either, would not have to wait for the change much longer. And indeed, our November Revolution followed soon: it came almost at the same time when the wall between the Germans was falling apart and the squares of GDR towns, large and small alike, were flooded with people. The ideals which the Saxons and the Czechs subscribed to in those days at their squares were the same: freedom, democracy, the rule of law and civic coexistence. The atmosphere of our squares then was similar too: we shared the same kind of hope, the same readiness to come forward on behalf of a common cause, we shared a solidarity and a desire to understand one another. It was as a consequence of this that the authorities of our post-November Republic were among the very first in Europe to support the idea of German reunification: I believe that the many unostentatious, yet all the worthier examples of cooperation between the Czechs and the Saxons we can see today, including the intensive collaboration of academic communities, have their roots partly, or maybe predominantly, in the mutual understanding originating from our shared historical experience.

Six years have passed since the great moments I have recalled here. You, as one of the new Lands of the Federal Republic of Germany, are already part of the democratic Europe which is in the process of integration, whereas we are finding ourselves, for the moment at least, in something like its antechamber. This, however,
does not change anything on the fact that our common experience has left behind both with you and with us analogous aftereffects.

Let me therefore avail myself of this solemn occasion to dwell briefly upon the phenomenon called post-Communism.

What does this term actually mean?

When a country is described as post-Communist it may be simply a reference to the external fact that it used to be Communist until quite recently. If someone uses the word 'post-Communist' in this sense neither of us has any reason to object to being mentioned with this attribute. Both the east of Germany and the Czech lands were indeed still under Communist domination until as recently as six years ago.

The adjective 'post-Communist' may, however, have a variety of other meanings. It can, for instance, describe a country going through the dramatic changes that inevitably occur after the fall of a Communist regime and that are necessarily of a revolutionary nature. That means a phase of impetuous formation of new political parties, reinstatement of parties that were previously banned and regeneration of those that existed under Communism, that is, the phase of the creation of a pluralist political spectrum. This is at the same time a period of a dramatic transformation of the constitutional system and of the law in general, as well as of fundamental systemic changes securing transition to a market economy, with privatization as a typical component of the process. When the term 'post-Communist' is used in this context, I believe that we both have valid reasons to object to being called post-Communist lands. The phase of the essential revolutionary changes is clearly already behind us.

The attribute 'post-Communist' is also often ascribed to political forces that grew out of formerly Communist parties and have dissociated themselves in one way or another, some more thoroughly, others less so, from their past history and their previous platforms. No such political forces play a decisive political role in either of our lands; thus, we are not post-Communist in this sense either.

Yet, the word 'post-Communist' does not have to have any of these political connotations; it can represent a sociological, psychological or existential category, describing a certain state of the mind of a human being or a society. I believe that neither of us would be sincere if we categorically claimed that we have nothing to do with this type of post-Communism. Its various manifestations, sometimes more pronounced, sometimes rather inconspicuous, can indeed be observed in our lands too, and it is our duty to analyze them so that we can deal with all the bad things which they entail.

Outwardly, the condition which might be described as the post-Communist state of mind manifests itself most often - in some cases rather markedly, in others only faintly - through feelings of an indistinct insecurity, absence of an anchor,
emptiness, or even frustration. I think that the cause of these feelings is evident: while we may have hated the way of life under Communism, unwittingly we all got used to it. Communism created a clear system of rules determining precisely what people could do and what they could not if they wanted to avoid a clash with the powers-that-be. The rules were often unwritten but they were clear enough: we all knew, for instance, when and where we could talk freely and when and where we could not, just as we all knew what we could expect to happen for sure, and what was out of the question. It was a grey, hollow and constricted life, but the boundaries it set us, though uncomfortably tight, were at the same time so firm that they gave us paradoxically a feeling of security. In addition to that, the paternalistic state offered social security schemes: we knew that we would always be looked after one way or another, even though the price we had to pay for it was a restriction of our freedom.

Suddenly, almost overnight, the system collapsed. All at once we found ourselves in a vast area of liberty, subconsciously falling for the impression that life had no boundaries at all any more. I often compare this state of mind to the mental disposition of a person suddenly released from prison after a long confinement: perhaps every released prisoner went through this curious state of wild euphoria combined with the thoroughly misleading impression that from then on he was allowed to do whatever he pleased. The hard and fast rules of prison life had ceased to apply, and it appeared that no rules at all would apply any longer.

This joyful mood is usually of short duration, being soon replaced by its very opposite, by that of depression. The ex-prisoner gradually discovers that he has now lost what for years used to be his security; the prison walls are gone, and at once the whole structure of values he learned to endure has fallen apart as well. He is seized by a feeling of insecurity and emptiness, he thinks of himself as uprooted and robbed of all his pillars; he believes he is hopelessly groping in the dark; the need to take his own decisions is a burden to him; he finds it difficult to ascertain what the rules are in the life outside prison. Sometimes this distressing sentiment makes ex-prisoners even think secretly about returning to prison; they begin to look back at it with a certain kind of nostalgia.

Of course, I do not claim that this post-Communist frustration is a fundamental or general feature of all societies that have rid themselves of Communism. That is certainly not the case. But as a phenomenon, somewhere only marginal, elsewhere widely noticeable, it is present in all these societies. People find it difficult to get accustomed to the completely new type of responsibility that comes to them in a free environment. Some cannot cope with the need to take care of themselves in a much wider measure than they did before, others believe that this is a time of no values and thus of no rules whatsoever; the set of the old values has disappeared, and the new ones have not yet been absorbed.

I think that many of the unhealthy occurrences that appear in our societies, time and again taking us by surprise, have their roots in the frustrated post-Communist state of mind I have just described.
One of the many different manifestations of the frustration I am talking about here is the view which might be summed up in the adage "that's not what we struggled for". Many people cherish the unforgettable memory of the moments when they stood at their town squares joined together by a deep feeling of solidarity, intoxicated by the atmosphere of togetherness, unity and a shared hope which prevailed there while the Communist power was breaking down right before their eyes. It was a time of a great surge of enthusiasm and a great euphoria when the atmosphere of the moment - combined with our abysmal unfamiliarity with anything other than the Communist-ruled environment - wrapped our joint ideals in a variety of illusions, or even turned them into illusions. We knew the West from the outside, that is, we knew its shop windows, the endless abundance of goods, the streams of polished cars, the TV ads offering trips to southern lands. Our idealized vision of the West disregarded the fact that the economic miracle involved a great deal of hard work, a great deal of insecurity, and a great deal of personal responsibility and that it made great demands on all while guaranteeing no one that he would achieve what he had wished for. In the revolutionary excitement, many simply fell for the erroneous belief that from then on their life would be a paradise on Earth. It is the same error which released prisoners tend to make when leaving the prison gates.

Needless to say, no paradise on Earth materialized. Soon people were confronted with countless new problems which until then they had not known, or at least of which they had not had any direct personal experience. And so, it happens that some of us, especially the weaker ones or those for whom emotions far too easily prevail over the ability of down-to-earth discernment, are inclined to believe that they have been misled or cheated, and that someone is not fulfilling the promises he gave them. The fact that these supposed promises were often rather their own dreams is a reality they refuse to recognize. And because it is always easier to be angry with others or with the whole world than to be angry with oneself, many then start to accuse the whole world of an alleged deception. We know what the outcome has been: such people lend a willing ear to the luring voice of a populist who says out loud what they have been thinking about being deceived and who promises them that he will set things right and, with a strong hand, will build for them the much sought after paradise on Earth after all.

Communism was a collectivist ideology. Repugnant as we may have found it, its long-standing, everyday, devious influence has obviously lowered the threshold of our immunity to collectivist infection. The insidiousness and dangerousness of collectivism of any ideological persuasion lies in its making of our lives seemingly very easy. It does not build on our own skills and abilities, on that which we are as individual and unique human beings, but rather on that which came to us without any effort on our part - on our affiliation to some collective which fate simply happened to throw us into.

Many of those people who after the fall of Communism find themselves unable to cope in a timely manner with hitherto unknown demands on their individuality and individual responsibility for themselves and for the world, and whose immunity from collectivist temptations has been weakened by the long life under Communism, easily
fall for the enticing appeal to something which they possess without having to do anything to get it. This, clearly, is where we can find a cause of the growth of nationalism, xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and similar dangerous phenomena that we observe - in a greater or lesser measure - in all the countries which have shaken off Communism.

For how easy it is to get rid of our existential distress by resorting to our affiliation to a pack, to a brotherhood of the blood or colour of the skin, and by substituting confidence in its leader for our own individual responsibility! I believe that here on German soil in particular, I do not have to explain at length how easily people can be seduced by such demons of tribal self-definition and what tragedies and horrors this can eventually cause. Actually, collectivism is nothing but a disguised form of weakness, if not even of self-hate.

Often when we hear about growing crime rates, about the wicked practices of extremists and terrorists, about the abuses committed by skinheads, we ask ourselves: how come that human beings can be like that? where did such evil come from? Haven’t we, in our spiritual context, realized since long ago that this is a sure road to hell? Although these are phenomena whose roots lie deeper and which can be found everywhere, having to do with the development of our civilization in general and with the very temperament of humanity, I find they assume in the post-Communist environment a specific colour, a colour affected largely by the frustration in human minds that has emerged as one of the many negative consequences of a long life under Communist rule.

What can we do against it? How can we resist the adverse effects of the post-Communist state of mind?

It seems to me that there is but one path: in all fields of human coexistence, and in every way we can, we should foster commitment to the civic principle and the sense of civic responsibility; we should see to it that the state places increasing confidence in its citizens, putting its faith in what is good in them; we should cultivate human solidarity, tolerance and sense of law; we should nurture our democratic institutions and, last but not least, we should enhance in ourselves as well as around us an awareness of the source of all these things: the moral order that is both in us and above us. This is a major challenge for teachers, educationalists, politicians, journalists, for all of us who know what fruit can be borne out of an indifference toward the demons that seek to penetrate all uprooted souls.

But it is not only enlightenment that is needed. It is also courage to work for broad-minded political solutions. This is where I see a great responsibility of the West. If it hesitates too long about the integration of the countries which have rid themselves of Communism into its democratic structures it might one day stand astounded: if the demons are left unchecked in the East they will soon spread to the West too. The whole of Europe would thus miss the historic chance it now has: for the very first time in its history it can become a continent of peaceful cooperation of all its members, their life together being based on equality, not on the domination of
ones over others through superior strength. Besides that, there is also the risk of perpetuating the system of thinking which uses unholy categories such as "the Germans" vs. "the Czechs", or "the Wessis" vs. "the Ossis". Those who happened to be born west of the Iron Curtain should realize that it was just good luck for which they deserve no special credit. Those born east of it should rather make an effort to learn about Western civic and political culture than embrace the brainless world of stupid commercials and silly TV series. The "Ossis", for their part, bring into German politics a most significant contribution which may not have been sufficiently recognized in West Germany so far: their understanding for their eastern neighbours and concrete steps to meet the latter's concerns. For East Germans and Czechs, our shared negative historical experience with Communist totalitarianism made mutual resentments relating to World War II recede to where they belong, that is, into history, and developed a more acute perception of each other's positions. Let us admit that one of the problems of the Czech-German relationship consists in a lack of knowledge of, and understanding for, each other's situation. This is true on the German side too.

Good neighbourly relations between the Germans and the Czechs constitute one of the little building blocks in the great work of construction of a united and democratic Europe. I am happy to see that the Saxons, having gone through the same historical experience as the Czechs, are well aware of that and are unostentatiously working to intensify these good ties. I am grateful to you for this. By the same token, we too feel the need to live together as good neighbours.

Let me thank you for honouring me today and giving your attention to these remarks.

Translated by A. Brabcová, A. Barclay
Address
by
Václav Havel,
President of the Czech Republic

National Press Club
Canberra, Australia
29 March 1995
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin with a brief personal remark: for virtually my whole life, with the exception of a short period in the late sixties, I was barred from leaving my country. As the long decades went by, I got so used to this absurd situation that I simply assumed I would never ever get to see any other parts of the world. Needless to say, visiting a continent as distant as Australia was, I thought, absolutely impossible. In my mind, Australia was one of those fabulous worlds beyond reach, worlds one cannot enter, just as one cannot land on a far-away star, or step into another century.

A few years ago everything changed. The world opened up to us all and I - as Head of State - began to travel all over the globe. The most important thing I learned from this sweeping change was how small our planet really is, and how much closer together places are than I once believed. For this reason, I found it all the more astonishing that the people living on this small planet are incapable of living together, that they constantly wage countless wars and have innumerable conflicts. Sometimes it took only a few minutes to fly over a territory that has been the object of strife for centuries. Though on my official trips I travel by ordinary plane and not by spacecraft, I still feel I am beginning to understand the experience of astronauts to whom all earthly conflicts appear to be no more than trifles, incomprehensible, petty and nonsensical, when they watch our planet from outer space.

Having said that, I should like - in my Czech accent which, I'm afraid, is a far cry from the Australian one - to share with you certain thoughts that come to my mind when I wonder about why people behave so badly, and about where to look for the hope that they might behave better in future.

For thousands of years humans lived and evolved in different parts of the Earth in fairly autonomous entities. Cultures and whole civilizations appeared and disappeared, cultures that - seen from a modern perspective - remained largely confined within their own territories, isolated from one another. If they knew about each other at all, their contacts were minimal. In those times, few, if any, events in the human world could have had a substantial and immediate impact on the world as a whole.

Nowadays, things are very different. Within a fairly brief period of time - no more than a fraction of human history - a global civilization has come into being and spread around the whole planet, linking the different parts of it together, absorbing cultures or spheres of civilization which had for so long
developed as autonomous units, and forcing them to adjust. A great many of the conflicts or problems in our world today, it seems to me, can be attributed to this new reality. They can be explained as struggles of different cultural identities, not with this civilization, but within themselves, for the survival or enhancement of what they are and the ways in which they differ from each other - struggles for what they appear to be losing. Some say we are living at a time in which every valley wants to be independent. Sometimes this really seems to be the case. This desire for independence is an understandable reaction to the pressure to integrate and unify exerted by our civilization. Cultural entities shaped by thousands of years of history are resisting this, for fear that within a few years they might dissolve in some global cultural neutrality. If we mix all the colours together we get grey. Cultures of different colours are apparently wrestling with the danger of turning grey in the melting pot of a single civilization.

How can we overcome this contradiction? Where can we turn to for hope?

The solution certainly does not lie in blindly putting our faith in the essentially theistic technological civilization of today. We should not rely on the assumption that this civilization, supposedly more progressive than all the multifarious cultures and civilizations of the past, is more worthy than they are, or that it is justifiable to suppress and annihilate traditions in its name because they are believed to slow the victorious progress of history. Man is also man’s own past; fighting with the past would mean declaring war on humanity itself. On the other hand, rejecting the present civilization, abandoning all the good things it has brought and attempting to return to some by-gone tribal life is not a solution either.

The only wise course is the most demanding one: we must start systematically to transform our civilization into a truly multicultural civilization, one that will allow everyone to be themselves while denying no one the opportunities it offers, one that strives for the tolerant coexistence of different cultural identities, one that clearly articulates the things that unite us and can develop into a set of shared values and standards enabling us to lead a creative life together. I am happy to be able to reiterate this profound conviction here in Australia - a country that could serve to many others as an example of a working multicultural democracy that is trying to follow a course which can offer a way out of the maze of pitfalls humankind currently finds itself lost in.

The main question is this: where we should look for sources of a shared minimum that could serve as a framework for the tolerant coexistence of
different cultures within a single civilization. It is not enough to take the set of imperatives, principles or rules produced by the Euro-American world and mechanically declare them binding for all. If anyone is to accept these principles, identify with them and follow them, those principles will have to appeal to something that has been present in him or her before, to some of his or her inherent qualities. Different cultures or spheres of civilization can share only what they perceive as genuine common ground, not something that some simply offer to or even force upon others. The rules of human coexistence on this Earth can work only if they grow out of the deepest experience of everyone, not just some. They have to be formulated so as to be in harmony with what man - as a human being, not as a member of a particular group - has learned, experienced, endured.

Every unbiased person will have no trouble knowing where to look. If we examine the oldest moral canons, the commandments that prescribe proper human conduct and the rules of human coexistence, we find numerous essential similarities among them. It is often surprising to discover that virtually identical moral norms arise in different places and different times, largely independently of one another. Another important thing is that the moral foundations upon which different civilizations or cultures were built always had transcendental, or metaphysical roots. It is scarcely possible to find a culture that does not derive from the conviction that a higher, mysterious order of the world exists beyond our reach, a higher intention that is the source of all things, a higher memory recording everything, a higher authority to which we are all accountable in one way or another. That order has had a thousand faces. Human history has known a vast array of gods and deities, religious and spiritual beliefs, rituals and liturgies. Nevertheless, since time immemorial, the key to the existence of the human race, of nature and of the universe, as well as the key to what is required of human responsibility has always been found in what transcends humanity, in what stands above it. Humanity must respect this if the world is to survive. To this day, this point of departure has been present in all our archetypal notions and in our long-lost knowledge, despite the obvious estrangement from these values that modern civilization has brought with it. Yet, even as our respect for the mysteries of the world dwindles, we can see for ourselves again and again that such a lack of respect leads to ruin. All this clearly suggests where we should look for what unites us: in an awareness of the transcendential.

I possess no specific directions on how to revive this awareness which was once common to the whole human race, on how to retrieve it from the depths to which it has sunk, or how to do this in a way that is appropriate for this era and at the same time universal, acceptable to all. Yet, when thinking about it,
no matter where or in what context, I always - without intending to - come to
the conclusion that this is precisely where we should begin the search for the
means of coexistence on this planet, and for the salvation of the human race
from the many dangers to its existence that civilization generates. We should
seek new ways to restore the feeling for what transcends humanity, for what
gives a meaning to the world surrounding it, as well as to human life itself.

Dostoyevsky wrote that if there were no God everything would be
permitted. To put it simply, it seems to me that our present civilization, having
lost the awareness that the world has a spirit, believes that anything is permitted.
The only spirit that we recognize is our own.

However different the paths followed by different civilizations, we can
find the same basic message at the core of most religions and cultures
throughout history: people should revere God as a phenomenon that transcends
them; they should revere one another; and they should not harm their fellow
humans.

To my mind, reflecting on this message is the only way out of the crisis
the world finds itself in today. Of course, such a reflection must be free of
prejudice and it must be critical, no matter who may turn out to be a target of
that criticism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to offer you a specific illustration of this general idea.

The Euro-American world of modern times has developed a fairly
consistent system of values of human coexistence, which is now accepted as a
basis of international coexistence, too. These values include the concept of
human rights and liberties growing out of respect for the individual human being
and his or her dignity. They include democracy which rests on separation of the
legislative, executive and judicial powers, on political pluralism and free
elections. And they include respect for private ownership of property and the
rules of the market economy. I unreservedly subscribe to this system of values
and so does the Czech Republic.

And yet, from different parts of the world, including the Pacific region,
we hear voices calling these values into question, arguing that they are the
creation of a single culture and cannot simply be transferred to other cultures.
Naturally, such voices point out all the faults to be found in the West in order to make their case that these values are faulty or inadequate. One typical argument is that Western democracy is marked by a profound crisis of authority and that without respect for authority as a means of ensuring law and order, society is bound to fall apart.

The odd thing is, those who say this are right and wrong at the same time.

They are certainly right in saying that the Western world is suffering from a crisis of authority. As a man who is a fairly recent arrival in the world of high politics, and who has suddenly seen it from the inside, I have time and again experienced the odd fact that the public, other politicians, and the media as well are far more interested in casting doubt on the authority of a politician than they are in whether it is desirable that he or she should wield authority in the first place. This is not something I mind personally - for one thing, nobody can have as many doubts about myself as I can. But I am concerned about this phenomenon as a political reality. If politicians have no authority at all, the state and its various constituent parts cannot have any authority either. This, in turn, has an adverse effect on society.

But is this crisis of authority a product of democracy? And if so, does it not follow that an authoritarian regime, a dictatorship or a totalitarian system are preferable to democracy after all?

That is certainly not the case.

The present crisis of authority is only one of a thousand consequences of the general crisis of spirituality in the world at present. Humankind, having lost its respect for a higher, superterrestrial authority, has necessarily lost respect for any earthly authority, too. Consequently, people also lose respect for their fellow humans and eventually even for themselves. This loss of a transcendental perspective, to which everything on this Earth relates, inevitably leads to a collapse of earthly value systems as well. Humanity has lost what I once privately described as the absolute horizon; and as a result, everything in life has become relative. All sense of responsibility disintegrates, including responsibility for the human community and its authorities. This is a philosophical, not a political problem. However, even a decaying or diminishing democratic authority is a thousand times better than the thoroughly artificial authority of a dictator imposed through violence or brainwashing.
Democracy is an open system, and thus it is capable of improvement. Among other things, freedom provides room for responsibility. If that room is not sufficiently used, the fault does not lie with democracy, but it does present democracy with a challenge. Dictatorship offers no room for responsibility, and thus it can generate no genuine authority. Instead, it fills all the available space with the pseudoauthority of a dictator.

Potential dictators are well aware of the crisis of authority in democracy. The less the atheistic man of today heeds the challenge that democracy presents him, the less he succeeds in filling the room it offers by taking genuine and unquestioned responsibility, the faster a dictator, posing as the bearer of universal responsibility, will proceed to occupy that room until finally he will occupy it entirely. Hitler, Lenin or Mao were typical examples of this species. Filling all the available room with a completely false authority, they closed it off, destroyed it and eventually destroyed democracy itself. We all know where this leads: to hecatombs of the dead, the tortured or the humiliated. In a word: while democracy paves the way to the creation of real authority, an authoritarian regime blocks that path with a terrible barrier, with the caricature of authority.

The chances for a successful existential revolution - as I once metaphorically described the awakening of a deeper human responsibility - are far better under freedom and democracy than under a dictatorship, where the only room offered to anyone who wishes to take responsibility is a prison cell.

The Western world cannot be faulted for sticking to democracy. Though democracy may surely take different forms, it is, today, the only way open to us all. What the West can be faulted for is its failure to properly understand and safeguard this fantastic accomplishment. Paralyzed by a general moral crisis, it has been unable to make use of all the opportunities offered by this great invention, and give a meaningful content to the space it has opened up. It is because of these deficiencies that madmen have, again and again, managed to devastate democracy and unleash a variety of global horrors.

What conclusion should we draw from this? That there is no reason to fear democracy, or to perceive it as a system that destroys authority and tears everything apart. Another option is available to those who wish to prevent this destruction: they can take democracy as a challenge to demonstrate responsibility and to introduce, or rather restore, the spirit and substance it once had when it first came into being. This is a superhuman task; yet, in the open system which democracy is, it can be accomplished.
In cultures where the roots of democracy are still shallow, or where democracy has not taken root at all so far, and where a free individual means virtually nothing while the leader is omnipotent, leaders often appeal to the centuries-old traditions of authority in their sphere, and seek to give legitimacy to their dictatorial rule by claiming to continue these traditions.

Again, they are both right and wrong. They are wrong in that what they present as the continuity of ancient traditions is in fact their negation. While recalling the natural authority that leaders may possess in their cultural systems, they replace it with an unnatural authority. Instead of an authority emanating from charisma, authority as an innerly perceived and widely accepted higher vocation, authority marked by a high degree of responsibility toward their self-imposed task, instead of this, they establish the utterly secularized authority of the whip.

Thus, - to put it in simplified terms - if the East can borrow democracy and its inherent values from the West as a space in which a reawakening sense of the transcendental can restore authority, then the West can learn from the East what true authority is, what it grows from, and how it conducts itself. It can then be spread throughout the zone of human freedom which it has created. I think in this context of Confucius, who so aptly described what it means to wield genuine authority. His standards have very little in common with the ideas of today’s men of the whip. To him, authority - be it in the father of a family or the ruler of a state - is a metaphysically anchored gift whose strength derives from his or her heightened responsibility, not from the might of the instruments of power he or she may wield. Moreover, charisma is lost when a person betrays it.

Though many see them as opposites, both East and West are in a sense enmeshed in the same problem: both are betraying their own deepest spiritual roots. If they were to look back and draw from these roots more of their life-giving sap, each might not only do better for itself, but they might immediately begin to understand each other better than they do now.

This small example of what the West can give the East, and vice versa, may perhaps illustrate that a search for common principles and objectives can be useful for everyone, and that it may be pursued without anyone losing their identity in the process. It also shows that such a search would be unimaginable if we do not make contact with the original, long-forgotten transcendental roots of our cultures. In the moral world of Antiquity, of Judaism and of Christianity, without which the West would hardly have come to modern democracy, we can
find more points of agreement with Confucius than we would think, and more than is realized by those who invoke the Confucian tradition to condemn Western democracy.

Dear Friends,

I hope that you have understood what I meant to say, despite my Czech accent and the simplified way I have attempted to condense, in a few sentences, some of my thoughts about the present-day world. I see the only chance for today's civilization in a clear awareness of its multicultural character, in a radical enhancement of its inner spirit and in an effort to find the shared spiritual roots of all cultures, for they are what unites all people. It is on this basis that we should articulate anew the standards and practices that will enable us to live together in peace without having to give up our identities. We have an opportunity now to open up an entirely new era of mutual inspiration. The preconditions for this are genuine openness, the will to understand each other, and the ability to step beyond the confines of our own habits and prejudices. Identity is not a prison, it is an appeal for dialogue with others.

I invite you all most cordially to come to visit the Czech Republic, a small country situated in the very centre of Europe. It is my hope that you will not have to go through any battlefields on the way, and that you will feel what I feel whenever I travel: that our planet is small, and a rather nice place to live, and that it would be the greatest absurdity of all if those destined to live together on it were to fail to do so, despite the fact that love for one's fellow humans is the central commandment of all our contending cultures.

Thank you for your attention.