

“The Czech Republic on its Way to the EU – Efforts and Results”

Dear Mr President,
Your Excellency,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the opening of my address let me thank you for this opportunity to visit the Danish Parliament and share with you my opinions on the current course of events in the European Union and the forthcoming developments. By way of introduction, allow me to express my opinion that regardless of the deepening of the EU integration course, the quality of the relations in this Community is based on the level of relationships among the Member States. In this respect, I am glad that Czech-Danish relations are not only excellent at present, but also that our mutual ties go back to the distant past.

A positive part in Danish medieval history was played by Queen Dagmar – the Czech Princess Markéta Přemyslovna (Margaret Premyslid). In the church of Saint Bendt at Ringsted, where she is buried, next to her husband, King Valdemar, a memorial plaque was unveiled in the 1920s. It expresses a wish, in Czech and in English, that the two nations should strive for mutual friendship, understanding, and getting closer to each other as successfully as the Czech Princess in Denmark did at the beginning of the 13th century.

Now, on the threshold of the 21st century, the Czech nation – together with the nations of nine other countries – is preparing to take a decisive step towards a definitive overcoming of the separation established after World War II. In this context, Denmark assumes the role of someone, who as the country holding the Presidency of the EU has to initiate and put into effect the completion of this historic integration process. It is obvious that the priority of Denmark as a presiding country reflects the stance of the Danish political elite, as it is based on the opinions of the Danish public, which constantly manifests strong support for the enlargement process of all the Member Countries. Politicians in a number of other Member Countries, where the public does not pay as much attention to this project, would definitely like to know the secret of this favourable response of the Danes.

Nevertheless, my analogy with Queen Dagmar, who was able to win the affection of her new nation by her personal qualities and behaviour, is pertinent to our current situation only to a certain extent. Personal contacts play an important role in the overcoming of any vestige of mistrust. For instance, during the recent floods we could see for ourselves the strength of the manifestations of solidarity that poured into Prague from both individuals and groups who had once stayed in the city and taken it into their hearts.

May I avail myself of this occasion to thank you sincerely for the effective humanitarian aid which the Danish Government delivered to us at the time when our country was hit by the disastrous unprecedented floods. We realise fully that solidarity is intrinsic to the Danish society and we appreciate very much the promptness with which this aid was provided. We are also most appreciative of all the manifestations of sympathy on the part of the Danish public, which again convinced us of the existence of the traditional ties of friendship between our countries. At present, we are having talks with the European Commission about the conditions of receiving the aid from the European Union. Among other things, we rely on the support of the Danish Presidency with a view to agreeing with the European Commission the most simple and effective manner of the aid implementation. We very much appreciate the promptness with which the European Union was able to respond to the Summit of the four countries struck by the devastating floods. The setting up of the Damage Elimination Fund, where both the Member and the Candidate Countries will have an equal say, is an obvious example, proving that the enlargement of the European Union is now, in fact, a reality.

The elimination of the consequences of the natural disaster is going to be a long-term task. I would like to stress in this respect that our preparedness to join the EU will not be jeopardized by the tasks that we are having to cope with during the reconstruction of our country after the floods. Our citizens have already shown their enormous determination and tenacity and the Czech Government will make every effort to overcome the consequences of the floods as promptly as possible. We believe that in these efforts we can continue to rely on genuine solidarity, which exists between the Member Countries of the European Union and which is one of the fundamental principles of European integration. The Czech Government is well aware of the fact – and let me bring this to your attention – that the visibility of the European Union's assistance in the elimination of damage caused by the floods may contribute significantly to a positive perception of the European integration process by the Czech public, to a deeper understanding of the Union as a community of shared values.

We appreciate the fact that Denmark has quite explicitly defined as the priority of its Presidency the completion of the EU enlargement. In our opinion, the Danish concept of organization of the final stage of negotiations is reasonable and we hope that a constructive approach will be adopted not only by the Candidate Countries, which were urged to do so at the EU summit at Seville, but also by all the Member Countries of the European Union. In accordance with the policy statement of my Government, the strategic priority of the Czech Republic consists in the completion of the country's preparations for its accession to the EU and, at the same time, in the conclusion of the negotiations, in such a manner that the Czech Republic might join EU as from 1 January 2004. We expect that the European Commission will publish in mid-October its regular appraisal reports on the Candidate Countries and based on them, it would then recommend which Candidates may complete the accession negotiations by the end of the year. As far as we know, there are no obstacles that would prevent the Czech Republic joining.

The Czech Republic exerted much effort in the past years to be prepared for EU accession. Basically, we are ready to join the EU. Of the total of 31 negotiating chapters, we have closed 25 so far, the remaining six being in the final stages of negotiation. There are certain precisely defined issues, such as for instance 'cabotage' in the Transport Chapter or the representation of the Czech Republic in the European Parliament in the Institutions Chapter, that still need to be negotiated. We do not believe that a hasty closing of the Chapters, at any cost, would be beneficial for the Czech Republic or for the European Union. Our aim is to be a trustworthy and equal partner to the other Member Countries, as

far as possible, and we want to be able to meet the obligations assumed by us in full, and at the same time, have a majority support or at least understanding on the local political and economic scene and, of course, among our citizens.

In our negotiations with the European Commission we, as a matter of principle, endeavour to take a constructive and realistic approach, as requested by the EU, and we expect the same from the Commission. In our opinion, the EU enlargement cannot be in any manner linked with the discussion on a reform of Common Agricultural Policy, since there is a danger that by insisting on reciprocity in the two issues, eventually, none of the objectives would be achieved. We are ready and we intend to conclude the accession negotiations by the end of this year, but not at any cost. We request and expect an adherence to the principles of equal treatment of both the existing and future EU Member Countries. We do not push for any privileges, what we want is just a consistent application of *acquis communautaire*, which is strictly required from our country by the EU anyway. We stress that the new Member States must join EU under such conditions that would allow them to be competitors to the existing members, even in agriculture. The Czech Republic by no means wants to be converted after joining the EU into a mere importing country without its own production. We are also convinced that the budgetary position of the new Member Countries after their accession to the EU should be improved significantly, in comparison with the previous state of affairs.

These are conditions which would help us to obtain a resounding 'yes' in a referendum which we plan to hold next year. Our country does not have a tradition in holding referenda, comparable to Denmark, and prior to the holding of the referendum as such, it will be necessary to amend the relevant domestic legislation.

The Czech Government is implementing a special type of communication strategy focused on the widest audience, aiming to tell the citizens truth about the prospects relating to the membership of the EU and convincing them of the necessity and benefits of this step. The results of the governmental communication strategy are not, of course, hundred per cent successful. Nevertheless the Czech public – especially students and young people – have shown a considerable interest in it. The public opinion polls indicate that the respondents who definitely support the accession account for 41% to 49% of the citizens. This, however, does not mean that all other citizens are against it. Approximately 25% of the respondents simply do not have any opinion on the accession to the EU, and the remaining 25% are against it. At the same time, not all citizens intend to take part in the planned accession referendum. Of those who do intend to take part in the referendum, some 70% are willing to vote for accession and 30% against it.

Ladies and Gentlemen, .

Our experience leads us to the conclusion that the Czech Republic has in Denmark an effective ally in the promotion of her European and Euro-Atlantic interests. Let me assure you that Denmark may rely on the Czech Republic on the international scene, too.

I am convinced that this has been proved by our activities within NATO and that I will be able to say the same thing about our involvement in the European Union, once the Czech Republic becomes a full-fledged Member.

Our mutual relations have been developing dynamically since 1989, opening new ways for co-operation, based on the principles of equality and opportunities for further mutual integration in the political, economic and social field. The prerequisites for a deeper co-operation stem, among other things, from the comparable size of our countries, from similar focus on equal status of the larger and smaller EU Member Countries, from a considerable extent of complementarity of our economies, the limited possibility of any conflict of economic interests, a comparable role of the European Union in the share of foreign trade of both countries, the same attitude towards protection of human and civil rights, and the absence of any negative historic reminiscences in our relations.

There is an interest common to our countries, for example in the area of addressing unemployment or environmental issues, in relation to which Denmark is working on interesting and useful projects performed in Prague in partnership with the Czech Civil Service, within the preparation of CR for membership in the form of 'twinning,' in the area of reform of funds and the agricultural policy as a whole, or the streamlining of the decision-making EU mechanisms.

As far as our economic relations and investment activities are concerned, I would like to emphasise that we regard Denmark as a major and prospective partner, with a view to the possible integration of the Czech industry into the European structures. The Czech Government strongly supports the influx of direct foreign investments and creates a positive investment environment. The recent privatisation of the telecommunications companies, Czech Radiocommunications and Czech Telecom, to which Danish companies were key partners, is proof of Danish interest in the Czech economy. This also shows that we ensure that foreign investors have the same position as the Czech companies. With regard to the unprecedented floods I mentioned at the beginning, I would like to draw your attention to the current opportunities for Danish companies to directly participate in the reconstruction of the areas affected by the natural disaster, either in the form of standard investments or in the form of know-how sharing.

In the security field, our countries belong among the most active advocates of a further substantial enlargement of NATO. In Czech and Danish eyes, the Alliance is a guarantor of European security. The countries invited to join NATO should certainly be able to comply with all the membership terms and conditions in all respects, so that the Alliance is able to fulfil its tasks even after the enlargement. Both the Czech Republic and Denmark take for granted that the Baltic countries belong in this respect among the prominent candidates. In case of Slovakia we believe in the potential of a democratic and pro-integration oriented political spectrum to succeed in the parliamentary elections, which will take place in less than two weeks, and to effectively co-operate in the post-election period. The Czech Republic has a strategic interest in the pro-European and pro-integration orientation of the Slovak Republic.

In two months, despite the calamitous consequences of floods, international attention will concentrate on the Czech Republic due to the November NATO summit to be held in Prague, and a month later on Denmark due to the European Commission Summit in Copenhagen. We feel honoured by the fact that we will organise the meeting of the top representatives of the NATO Member Countries and Partner Countries of the Alliance. The historical importance of this event, when the meeting of the Heads of the NATO Member Countries and Governments will for the first time take place in a country behind the former "Iron Curtain", and moreover, in the city where in 1991 the Warsaw pact was definitively dissolved, is evident. The Czech Republic understands the decision to hold the summit in Prague as

appreciation of the gradual and successful integration of CR as a Full Member of the North Atlantic Alliance, and also as a token of trust Prague has won as a traditional host of important international events.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me briefly mention the Czech Government's view of our common future in an enlarged European Union. It is true that a successful completion of the accession negotiations with the EU is a key and logical object of my administration and of the Czech public attention. Attention paid to issues concerning the future of Europe and our country inside it has been building up and potential reforms of the European structures are being discussed.

The Czech Republic especially welcomed the chance to get actively involved in the Convention. We have addressed the issues related to the representation to the Convention using the same key as Denmark: the governing party filled the posts of the government representative and substitute, whereas all the four parliamentary posts were offered to an opposition party. Therefore, similarly to Denmark, the Czech Republic has representatives to the Convention, presenting different opinions on the EU and on desirable directions of further European integration development.

We believe that the Convention meeting will formulate one document that can have a form of a draft proposal for Treaty and where, in addition to the basic document, the options most often discussed in the Convention will be laid down. After the completion of its work a period of reflection should follow during which we could discuss with our public the content of the proposal. We are sure that the next Intergovernmental Conference that will pass the final wording of the Treaty will take place with the full participation of the new Member Countries.

The Czech Republic that will be in the EU context a new, middle sized, economically relatively less developed country embedded in the Central European region, agrees that the future European Union should continue in the integration in areas of vital common interests (common foreign and security, refugee and immigration policy, addressing of environmental issues, protection of external borders, persecution of international criminality, war against terrorism), that policies with mutual solidarity element (regional, agricultural policy) and the policy of equal opportunities (competition policy) remain preserved. We support simplification of agreements with respect to existing contractual and political development. In our opinion, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms should become part of the Treaty. We will welcome a clarification of the competencies between the Union and National Countries, that should however include the possibility of flexible reaction to the future development and more consistent application of and control over the principle of subsidiarity. It will be important to keep a balance between the EU and the National Countries and among the individual European institutions in an enlarged Union. We therefore support the maintenance of a strong, proactive role of the Commission, we welcome the approved reforms of the Council which are currently being launched under the Danish Presidency. We are carefully monitoring the discussions concerning the Presidency form. Finding forms to enhance the support of the European Parliament legitimacy will also be an important task for old and new Member Countries. Strengthening of the role of the national parliaments as natural sources of legitimacy and democratic control in the European policy of individual countries is an important task.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In addition to the overall visions of the EU structure, the Czech Republic must now consider the partners which it will find within the individual EU regions. The standing platform of the 'Visegrad Four' will certainly be preserved in part. In a number of areas we believe in co-operation with the Benelux countries with which the Visegrad Four has already established some fruitful contacts. In the future we also hope in contacts with the Scandinavian countries. It is obvious that among the Scandinavian countries Denmark has the most experience in co-operation within EC and the EU. We believe that in addition to her long-term priority, the Candidate Countries in the area of the Baltic Sea, Denmark is willing to closely co-operate with other new Central European Members, including the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic is for example interested in Denmark's experience in the national parliament commitment in the creation of and democratic control over the European policy and in Denmark's experience in the operation of the European Parliament and the presentation of this European institution to the Danish public. We are also interested in informing the public about European matters and keeping the public interested in European issues. According to the Eurobarometer surveys, in this respect the Danish public has turned out to be the most developed of all the Member Countries.

We are following with interest the Danish discussions and provisions for the reduction of illegal immigration and an improvement of the refugee and integration procedure. We are supporting the EU efforts for strengthening of European co-operation in the refugee and immigration area, and we believe that even in this area a Danish-Czech exchange of experiences may be useful.

By way of conclusion, let me express my opinion that the period by the end of this year will be full of events that will shape the future appearance of our continent for several decades. I am very glad that the presidency role has been assigned to a country that is interested very much in a successful completion of the accession negotiations. Like the Czech Republic, it is ready to do its best for the forthcoming Prague Summit to become a fitting contribution to the Copenhagen Summit negotiations.

Thank you for your attention.