

Address given by Romano Prodi on the Czech Republic and the EU (Prague, 6 April 2001)

Caption: On 6 April 2001, during an official visit to Prague, the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, delivers an address on the essential place of the Czech Republic in the European Union.

Source: Rising to the challenge: joining the historic journey to an ever closer union, Speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission At the Liechtenstein Palace, Prague, Friday 6th April 2001. [ON-LINE]. [Prague]: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, [06.04.2001]. Disponible sur http://www.mzv.cz/_archiv/enprojevy/prodi.html.

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Address given by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, at the Liechtenstein Palace, Prague, Friday 6 April 2001

Rising to the challenge: joining the historic journey to an ever closer union

Prime Minister,
Ministers,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here in Prague. No-one who visits this splendid city can fail to be impressed by the extraordinary contribution the Czech people have made to European culture. Perhaps one reason why I feel quite at home here is that my own city, Bologna, was – like Prague – named as one of the European Cities of Culture in 2000. And I understand that many Italian architects and artists helped create Prague's unique atmosphere.

I am greatly looking forward to the day when the Czech Republic becomes a member of the European Union. As President of the European Commission, I have placed enlargement at the very top of the EU's political agenda. For the first time in history we are unifying Europe peacefully and democratically. On the basis of shared ideals and agreed common rules. We are bringing together not only the nations but, above all, the peoples of this continent in a new and much larger European family. The historic importance of what we are doing cannot be overestimated. But nor should we underestimate the scale of the challenge and the opportunity that enlargement represents for us all. It is first and foremost a challenge and an opportunity for the future Member States, such as the Czech Republic. You have had to cast off heavy burdens and make tremendous efforts to achieve social and economic reform. Walking around Prague today, I see signs everywhere that your efforts are bringing their reward. Not only are past glories being beautifully restored but you are also rapidly preparing to embrace the future.

Second, it is a historic duty – and a historic opportunity – for the current Member States to welcome back family members from whom we have been separated for too long. We belong together: we must never again be divided. Third, it is both a duty and an opportunity for the European institutions to show the citizens of Europe that we can deliver the New Europe we all want. Building that New Europe is our common task and we – the European institutions, the candidate countries and the Member States – must work at it together. At the Nice Summit in December, the European Union took a decisive step towards enlargement. We agreed a raft of fundamental revisions to the Union Treaty, and the Union is now ready to welcome new members. The discussions at Nice were difficult. I know: I was there! However, important decisions are never taken easily – and Nice showed how serious the Member States are about enlargement. The Commission has drawn up a "road map" for concluding the accession negotiations, and the Nice Summit has endorsed it. In the first half of this year, we are moving forward on a number of internal market issues and social matters, and pushing for an ambitious environmental programme.

During the second half of the year, we propose concentrating on other difficult chapters, like Transport or Justice and Home Affairs. Matters with budgetary implications can then be dealt with in the first half of 2002. Our "road map" sets out a timetable for the Council to present common positions to the candidate countries. The Commission is committed to making the necessary recommendations in good time. Candidate countries too must be prepared to give the necessary substantive commitments within the set period. And these commitments must be reflected by real changes on the ground. If all parties keep to this timetable, the citizens of the most advanced candidate countries could be taking part in the elections to the European Parliament in 2004. The current Member States fully expect to see Czech MEPs voting on European legislation in just over three years from now. This is something I am personally looking forward to. But I want to stress that it's up to you. Our fundamental negotiating principle is that each country will be judged on its merits and will proceed at its own pace. Your progress will depend, quite simply, on the speed with which you adopt and implement Community policies. I can assure you that there are no artificial or pre-set scenarios for membership. How can you ensure that you advance swiftly? In its last regular report, the Commission noted that the Czech Republic had made great progress in pushing through legal and other

reforms. These achievements have been reflected in the negotiations, where the Czech Republic remains among the front runners. We are about to enter into substantial discussions on the free movement of persons. This issue is nowhere near as dramatic as some people think. However, it does cause some nervousness in the current Member States. This is understandable, and we have to take it into account. Enlargement will nearly double the number of Member States and create much more economic diversity in the Union.

The Commission is working hard with the Member States to develop strategies to address the specific problems that will arise. I am confident that the Czech Republic, for its part, will show the necessary flexibility in the negotiations. A great deal of work also has to be done, at considerable cost, in areas such as energy, transport infrastructure and the environment. We need careful strategies here, and we must plan them with clear financial control and with respect for the Union's other policies. Meanwhile, economic reforms have to be completed - including restructuring major traditional heavy industries such as steel. The Commission is providing funds and advice to ensure that these reforms benefit the Czech Republic as a future member of the European Union. The key to real progress in all these areas is effective co-operation between the government and Parliament. It has enabled the Czech Republic to surmount many problems recently, and I look forward to seeing this co-operation continue.

There are three particular issues on which, in my view, it is vital to maintain this political consensus.

1. First, the need to establish a modern public administration. We in the European Commission are well aware how important this is. That is why we are now reforming our own organisation. We want to ensure the Commission remains the driving force behind European integration. This is possible only if we continue to receive public support. To earn that support we have to make sure we deliver the high-quality service European citizens rightly expect. Similarly, in deciding whether this country is ready to join the European Union, the Member States will want to be sure the Czech Republic can exercise all the obligations of membership. And that includes having a modern public administration. Delays in this area could put a brake on your strenuous efforts to modernise the country. So the Commission welcomes your ongoing constructive discussions on the recent proposal for a Civil Service Act. We trust they will soon produce fruitful results. The earlier your civil service reform begins, the sooner Czech citizens will be able to enjoy the fruits of European Union membership.

2. Second, the need to be able to enforce Community law from the very first day of EU membership. We certainly appreciate all you have done so far

- to adapt civil and commercial law,
- to lighten the administrative burden on judges
- and to improve training.

I want to encourage the Czech Republic to persevere in its efforts to keep the reform process on track. As a Member State of the European Union, the Czech Republic will have to respect the judgements of a court outside this country:- the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Prompt implementation of judgements by all courts is essential to maintain confidence in the judicial system.

3. Third, the increasing success of the Czech courts and police in fighting economic crime and corruption. This is particularly welcome since these stubborn problems require sustained attack. If public support and confidence are to be maintained, there must be

- real transparency in financial affairs,
- and complete impartiality in the way corruption cases are investigated and individuals prosecuted.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As an economist, I look very closely at statistics. I am pleased to see that, after a difficult period of recession, the Czech Republic's economy recovered well last year. In 2000, your GDP grew by more than 3%, and I understand that forecasts for this year are at least equally positive. The Czech Republic's record on

attracting foreign direct investment is second to none. To achieve economic competitiveness and macro-economic stability requires constant effort, both for candidate countries and for the Member States of the EU. We therefore encourage you to make your economic growth sustainable by pushing through all the remaining structural reforms. Membership in Economic and Monetary Union implies the Czech Republic has :

to submit itself to annual review by its peers,
to accept the discipline of the Maastricht criteria
and to respect the decisions of the independent European Central Bank.

It is therefore particularly important to ensure the independence of your own National Bank. In Stockholm, two weeks ago, the EU confirmed it is on the right track to become the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. So I welcome the Czech Government's commitment to bring the Internet into every school in the country. It is our young people who will make this knowledge-based economy a reality. One more thing is vital in ensuring your country's accession to the European Union: the understanding and support of your citizens. I am glad to see that political leaders in this country are increasingly willing to consult and inform the people about the enlargement process - through NGOs, schools, employer's representatives and so on. For the past few years, the European Commission has been making its own contribution to this crucial communication campaign. Before I came here, I gave a press conference at the Commission's public information centre in Prague. Here, public seminars are given on all aspects of EU policy, and information is prepared for distribution throughout the country.

Targeted communication strategies are now

- being prepared for each Member State, co-ordinated by the Commission
- and implemented by the Member State authorities.

These strategies will address specific concerns, such as those felt in border regions where agriculture is a key part of economic life. Europe's citizens need information and they need reassurance. You have a vital part to play in providing them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over 40 years ago, the overall aim of European integration was set down in the Treaty as an "ever closer union among the peoples of Europe". But the Union is constantly evolving and becoming increasingly diverse. At nearly 30 members, it will be very different from the six-member Community of 40 years ago. What sort of Union do Europe's citizens want in the 21st century? What is to be the end point of this process of "ever closer union"? Moreover, the world around us is changing rapidly, and Europe needs to shape the process of change. The enlarged Union can and must be a force for good in tomorrow's world. So, what policies do we need? And who should be responsible for doing what? The debate on these issues has started and a new IGC is scheduled in 2004. Our aim is to ensure that the Czech republic will be among the Member States taking part in that IGC. This country is already starting to make its contribution to the debate. The voice of your President is listened to very carefully in Brussels. Your Deputy Prime Minister Kavan gave an important speech in Brussels just a few weeks ago, describing the role he sees for the Czech Republic in the EU of tomorrow. The Commission, for its part, will soon be publishing a White Paper on European Governance.

It will launch a wide public debate on the division of labour

- between the European institutions,
- the Member States and civil society.

It will explore the possibilities for a new, networking form of partnership between the different levels of governance in Europe. Czech voices need to be heard on all these issues. Not only because they will affect Czech citizens but also because we need your unique perspective. The Czech Republic will soon be a



member of this Union.

The Czech people must play their full part in shaping its future. Starting now!