

The speaking points of the Minister Zorálek at the opening of the Czech-Austrian Dialogue Forum

- It is a great privilege to be here with Minister Kurz to launch the first Czech-Austrian Dialogue Forum. Let me take this opportunity to thank all those who made it possible: Czech embassy in Vienna, Austrian embassy in Prague, and in particular our hosts today, *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*.
- I can't think of an institution better suited to host such a dialogue: the IWM embodies the finest tradition of Central European intellectual exchange.
- The launch of the Forum represents an important moment for Czech-Austrian relations. It comes from the recognition that bilateral exchange should not be limited to governments, parliaments, regions or municipalities. It must include scholars, intellectuals, journalists - and what is commonly known as "civil society".
- The Forum could therefore be seen as an effort to widen our dialogue: to include more voices, more perspectives, and to generate wider public engagement. In this context, I would like to extend special thanks to Přemysl Janýr, who promoted this idea for a long time. I am glad he is with us today to see it come to life.
- The establishment of the Forum is also a testament to the positive dynamic of Czech-Austrian bilateral relations. You may remember that, in over ten years ago, our relations were plagued by miscommunication over nuclear energy or historical issues. I am extremely pleased and proud to say that we have overcome this difficult period.
- Today, Czech-Austrian relations are marked by trust and maturity - and a common sense of responsibility for the fate of our region, and for the European project. I should also add that the Forum **could be the core part of the “Neighbourhood Dialog 2030”, announced last year in Linz.**
- However, I would like to stress that the Forum must not be seen as just another political or diplomatic instrument. It is far more than that. The Forum should provide space for a genuine intellectual reflection - a critical debate that cuts to the core of issues affecting our two societies and the wider region of Central Europe.
- In today's troubled times, such a conversation is needed more than ever. The German novelist Thomas Brussig once wrote that crises choke any meaningful debate, even in democratic societies. We must not allow that to happen.
- That is why the choice of today's topic - radicalism and the rise of populist movements - is particularly timely and relevant, also in the context of the recent US election. Understanding the phenomenon of radicalism - its sources and consequences - may be the defining intellectual challenge of our generation. It is also a precondition for any effective political response on the part of part of democratic political parties, national governments, and the EU.
- Thanks to the IWM, I will have an opportunity to address the topic later in the evening, as part of the Political Salon.
- So, for the moment, let me wish you all a very productive session, and **I look forward to the next meeting of the Dialogue Forum in Prague next year.**