

Keynote Speech of Minister Petříček, Raisina Dialogue 2020

Raisina Dialogue, New Delhi, 15 January 2020

- Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is a true honour for me to address this distinguished audience today, in the most important forum on international relations in India, and possibly the whole Asia. I believe this Dialogue has substantial reach even globally. That corresponds to the global significance of India, our host country. I am visiting India with much pleasure and with hopes to further develop Indian-Czech and Indian-European relations.
- The subject on which I will speak – Europe's future in a multipolar world – is very dear to me.

Views of Europe's past and future

- It is not an exaggeration to say that the last centuries were Europe-dominated. Europeans controlled the seas, started the industrial revolution, colonized much of the world, and exported their products and their ideas. But they also ignited the two bloodiest conflicts the world has ever seen. This was a turning point in European history. The post-World War II generation of West European leaders realized that interdependence and co-operation can deliver on security and prosperity of citizens much better than wars or struggles for power at the expense of others. But is this something that united Europe could give others as a model?
- Post-Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Czechia, did feel attracted. And as they joined following their democratic revolutions, those ideas spread across the continent. For their part, the new members of the European Union brought fresh experience from decades of existence under totalitarian regimes – experience that was already waning in the West – and brought their eagerness to live in freedom.
- In 2000, a European author – Mark Leonard – argued that Europe will run the 21st century precisely because of its soft power, its attractiveness. According to him, Europe would serve as an example to the rest of the world through its democratic governance, economic and regulatory framework and power, openness to new members, and a non-bellucose approach to international crises.
- A few years later, an American author – Robert Kagan – argued that Europeans are naïve in believing that soft power matters most. In his view, Europe is locked up in a post-modern phantasy of eternal peace, while the world is in reality a predatory place. He also famously suggested that Europeans were from Venus, unlike Americans who were from Mars.
- I would argue that both views were right in a way. And I will try to explain why.

European soft power still matters

- First of all, I am convinced the European soft power does matter. And it will remain a major source of our strength for years to come, provided we get things right inside our own house.
- We Europeans may tend to feel in low spirits, perhaps especially in the wake of the rise of new powers, especially China, over the past years. This is not an unprecedented situation, though: we had similar feelings vis-à-vis Japan back in the 1980s.
- But we should rather be proud of what we have. Nowadays, Europe represents about 20% of the global economy. It is roughly the same size as the USA, while after World War II it was only half of that. Seven out of the top 10 most competitive economies in the world are European. We prove our global solidarity by being the biggest donor of official development assistance, accounting for around 60% of it globally. Our societies are not only prosperous, but also cohesive. And that I want to stress: we have a fairer distribution of wealth than other big economies, including the USA, and above all functional healthcare and social systems. This, I believe, makes us a very good place to live, and a model that can possibly be replicated elsewhere in the world.
- In the face of numerous recent crises we not only survived, but also managed to keep our core policies intact, including the internal market and free movement of people. And Eurosceptics did not prevail in the European elections in 2019, although many had feared that it could happen.
- Europeans have not lost their leadership drive on many issues either. In December, we committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050; yesterday much of the discussion here was indeed about climate change. By adopting the General Data Protection Regulation, we demonstrated our readiness to be a standard setter in the digital age. We remain active promoters of multilateralism in general, while acknowledging that it needs reform in many respects. We are firm believers in free trade as a path towards greater prosperity. We are determined to prevent the dismantling of arms control regimes. And we support human rights worldwide; while they may be a European invention, we firmly believe they have universal value.

Things that need to change

- But I also acknowledge that the sceptical view was right in a certain way. We cannot simply play on our presumed power of attraction as a role model for the world, and expect that others willingly dance to our tunes. If we want to survive in a multipolar world much more competitive than before, some things will have to change on our side.
- Firstly, we have to take security even more seriously. We have enjoyed a period of prosperity under the US security so long, that the defence spending and capabilities gap between the US and Europe became unsustainable. We cannot further rely on the USA

to always do the plowing while we Europeans only pick up the crops. Thus we need to spend more on security and invest more in capabilities.

- I am not arguing for a European Army, as some might think, or independent territorial defence of the European Union. We have the NATO to serve precisely that purpose. But we need to be ready for situations when the US is not willing to engage in crises that have direct security implications for Europe. We need to develop capabilities which can be used by both NATO and the EU. By doing that, we will fulfill our defence spending commitment, bolster the European pillar of the Trans-Atlantic Alliance, and alleviate the burden it bears.
- Secondly, the way Europeans go about foreign policy needs to improve. Our decision making is often too cumbersome. Rather than policies, we tend to adopt statements and proclamations that equal to the lowest common denominator. Most importantly, we have not yet been able to define European interest and common objectives clearly enough. So we are still on the way to a full “strategic convergence”, but we will be there within the next few years.
- What to do concretely? Well, if anybody had a silver-bullet solution liked by all EU countries, it would have been done already and I would not stand here speaking about this, because everybody would know what Europe is doing. But let me offer at least some suggestions. Firstly, our top decision-making should be more strategic, proactive and aimed at rules-based but flexible decision-making. Leadership by willing Member States on some issues should be made easier, while single-handed blocking of European consensus should become more difficult. Secondly, we need to allocate sufficient and flexible funds to pursuing Europe’s priorities in the global arena.
- Thirdly, Europe needs to hedge against its own vulnerabilities. In other words, we need strategic autonomy with a toolbox that will enable us to pursue our policy choices and limit others’ ability to push us around. For instance, we need to be able to protect our companies from extraterritorial sanctions of third countries. We have also been actively developing schemes to assess and possibly halt incoming foreign investments on the grounds of national security. Or the newly-defined European Green Deal, which will limit our dependence on fossil fuel suppliers. Finally, a European human rights sanctions mechanism should help us protect essential human rights standards internationally. And there are more examples.

Conclusion

- What to say in conclusion? I am quite sure that Europe will not “run” the 21st century. I hope, too, that no single country or a coalition of countries will do that. Rather, I hope that the world will be firmly governed by mutually agreed rules, enshrined in international law, and respected by all players. After all, this epitomizes what characterized post-war Europe and what is part of our “European DNA”: a spirit of peaceful co-operation.
- In fact, I believe this is the only possible way ahead for Europe as well as others. Whatever Europe, India, or any other player wants to really achieve in today’s complicated world, they will find they cannot go it alone. For our part, We Europeans

will want to ally with like-minded countries to support each other in our quests from climate change to cyber security to free trade to artificial intelligence and digital regulation. Global partnerships and coalition-building is something that Europe did not care about much in the past century, we have to admit. But we have started to learn since then, and we will step on the gas pedal to accelerate that effort.

- When coalitions and alliances are built, Europe will be able to contribute what it knows well: finding ways to jointly set the needed standards and agree on common regulations for the benefit of all partners.
- Finally, I want to say to our hosts today: I hope and believe that India, a growing power and the largest democracy in the world, can and will be Europe's firm ally in tackling the crucial challenges I mentioned. Moreover, I believe that we - Europeans and Indians - have no other choice than to join our efforts. We share not only the same democratic values, but also the same conviction as to how the world must work: based on rules and norms that emerge and get agreed in multilateral discussions. Indeed, I believe this is our shared vital interest, for which we need to work together. Let us not waste time and let's use the opportunity that presents itself to us.

Thank you for your attention.