

**Address of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of
the Czech Republic Jan KOHOUT
to the conference “*Czech Republic and Serbia: Cooperation for Integration*”
Belgrade, January 20, 2010**

Deputy Prime Minister Djelić, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this conference focused on the results as well as perspectives of the cooperation of our two respective countries.

I would like to express many thanks to Jagello 2000 and our active Embassy here in Belgrade for organising this event that provides an excellent opportunity to address this honourable audience. It is also a good occasion to present **“a *compte rendu*” of the last five years of Jagello’s activities in the region**. Let me use this opportunity to acknowledge the effort of Jagello 2000 and its contribution to the fostering the Serbian-Czech relations, in particular in the area of security and defence cooperation. I wish there were more NGO’s of that kind that assist in bringing the Western Balkan countries closer to the mainstream of the European and Euroatlantic integration.

Bilateral relations

Today, I had very fruitful discussions with Prime Minister Cvetković, Deputy Prime Minister Djelić, Ministers Jeremić and Šutanovac. All these talks took place in an open and friendly atmosphere and confirmed **excellent level of co-operation between our countries**. We had also an exchange of views on **incontestable accomplishments** achieved so far by Serbia and on challenges lying still ahead of this country, the whole region and the EU. I commend the commitment of your government to pursue the pro-european direction. My **main message** I brought to Belgrade, knowing also feelings of my EU colleagues, is that the **reforms, that should bring you closer to the rest of Europe, are a lasting process**. It goes without saying that the self-satisfaction with achieved partial progress might cause similar harm as the failed unrealistic expectations. The only way ahead for your country, as well as other countries of the region, is a swift recovery from looking into the policies of the past and unfounded adversities and at the same time **genuine opening to the all-inclusive regional co-operation**.

The **Czech - Serbian cooperation** is built on more than formal political ties. It is necessary to extend this cooperation in all directions. I am genuinely glad that it is growing from the grassroots level, through contacts between our

NGOs, institutions promoting the development of civil society, students enjoying the raising number of scholarships and businesspeople, creating new partnerships. Serbia is the biggest regional beneficiary of the Czech foreign development assistance. This should, however be in due time transformed so that it more focuses on supporting your European integration. Czech experts have already on many occasions offered their experience from the period of transformation, of reform processes and integration into the European Union and – should Serbia decided to do so – also with regard to NATO.

Also, we are encouraging Czech **investors** to increase the activity in this region and in your country. The shift to more strategic areas of cooperation should be intensified.

EU – CZ presidency, outlook

I also avail myself of this opportunity, as I did on every occasion today during my official talks with the leadership of Serbia, to congratulate your people from the bottom of my heart on the achievements so far on the path towards the EU. I had a particular warm feeling last month when Council of EU ministers agreed on **starting to implement the Interim Agreement on Trade and Trade Related Issues with Serbia**. It happened just few days after adoption of another milestone decision, on the **liberalisation of the visa requirements** for Serbia, which allows for easier people-to-people contacts among citizens of our countries. These steps were well deserved by the much-improved cooperation of Serbia with the ICTY and obviously by important reforms harmonising your and Union's system in many areas related to security, migration, human and minority rights.

Last but not least, I anticipate that the EU ministers shall **soon debate the handling of Serbia's EU membership application**. I hope that **during this semester** we will be in a position to **launch the ratification of the Stabilization and Association Agreement**. Let me underline, that the Czech Republic will support such a step. Continuation of the effective cooperation with ICTY and further achievements in this regard, will facilitate such a move.

Surely no other area was more fitting to the motto of the Czech EU Presidency **“Europe without barriers”** than the **visa liberalisation**. As we faced for many years a barrier of the Iron Curtain, we had striven for barriers to be torn down. Europe was not divided only by the Berlin Wall, or by barbed wire. The removal of physical barriers does not dismantle barriers in people's minds. And this is something that requires vigorous and lasting commitment, open

mindful and visionary policy on all sides. We believe that the hard work during our EU Presidency contributed to moving us one step closer towards this end.

We belonged to the strongest proponents of the visa liberalization for Western Balkans, even long before our EU Presidency. We are convinced that **easier people-to-people contacts** and free travelling are **the best way to achieve lasting reconciliation between the people of the Western Balkans** and reinforce their association with the European values.

With the recent experience from presiding the Council of the EU, let me focus on the **EU perspective of the Western Balkan region** too. The **enlargement dossier** remains close to my heart, and **high on the Czech foreign policy agenda**. We started with a clear vision that barriers, 20 years after the fall of Berlin Wall, should keep on falling. We set to ourselves – seem to be – modest aims, however we also delivered them to the Western Balkan region in a realistic way.

The region was **one of the three external relations priorities of the Czech EU Presidency**. This choice was based on our long-term conviction that **the best way towards a stable and prosperous South East Europe is a dynamic and merit-based process of enlargement**.

The **purpose behind the integration of Europe** is this: cooperation based on shared values and developed in peace bringing benefits for citizens across Europe and thus enhancing mutual respect and unity, and overcoming all the malevolent ideologies that divided our continent, ranging from the class-struggle ideology to **nationalism**. Term that some still confuse with genuine and responsible patriotism. Serbia is definitely welcome to join us in pursuing this goal. The road will not be an easy one, but the result is truly worth it.

The unfolding economic crisis, coupled with the energy one, represented particular challenge to our Presidency. This has only confirmed our conviction that the **enlargement tempo should be maintained**. We are convinced that wider internal market and economic cooperation enable the EU to respond better to the global challenges.

It is also fair to acknowledge, that **Sweden**, that had taken the helm of the EU after us, **kept the similar focus to the Western Balkans**, thus valorising the vested effort and bringing some dossiers to the successful conclusion. This is the way how the EU functions.

We, as two landlocked countries probably are not used to the naval phraseology, however, I deeply believe, that **overcoming those cliffs and straits of the internal institutional challenges of the EU**, we may now, with the Lisbon Treaty in force, new European Commission and European parliament in place, **head for the blue deep waters and steam towards EU enlargement with full vigour.**

It is not a mere coincidence, that the **European Commissioner** charged with the agenda of enlargement is a Czech and my longstanding colleague Stefan Fule. Our government purposely aspired for this portfolio, as we believe that a specific national experience may serve very well to the enlargement agenda. The hearing in the European Parliament last week showed that he is a **strong believer in further reunification of Europe** and confirmed his dedication to creating not only larger, but also stronger Europe. **Nevertheless**, he made also clear that clear **rules and conditions are set and that there will be no short-cuts to the EU membership.**

Euroatlantic integration

Ladies and gentlemen,

we welcome the recent concrete **steps by Serbia to enhance its cooperation with the North Atlantic alliance** and finally **make full use of its participation in the PfP**. Speaking of NATO's opinion it goes without saying that the Alliance would like to develop deeper relations with Serbia as an essential player in the Balkans.

In this context, it is an honour for the Czech Republic to play the prestigious and challenging **role of NATO Contact Point Embassy in Belgrade**. Through this role and where possible, we contribute to **foster contacts between Serbia and NATO** and to deliver information on Alliance to those in Serbia who display an interest in it.

Sometimes, the **EU and Euroatlantic integration processes** are equated to. It is not so. Neither are EU and NATO accessions on the same track, nor is NATO membership precondition for EU membership. Plain truth is that both organizations stand on similar principles of democracy, protection of human rights and require similar standards.

For **NATO**, the year **2010** will be an important year in many respects. The Allies should inter alia finalize the preparation of a **new strategic concept**. This time the debate will be considerably inclusive and it will be of importance to hear also Partners' views, including those coming from Serbia.

Apart from our continuous offer for practical bilateral assistance in Serbia's integration processes, the Czech Republic has been the **traditional supporter of Serbia's deeper involvement in the Partnership for Peace Programme**. We look forward to the deepening of NATO-Serbia relations, represented inter alia by the **opening of the Serbian Mission to NATO this year**. Having the fully fledged representation shall promote Serbia's voice whenever important issues are discussed and policies shaped.

Regional co-operation

Let me turn for a while the attention to the whole region of the Western Balkans. We must do our best for **achieving the lasting stability and fostering development of the Western Balkans**. But not for a kind of stabilization that only means conservation of the status quo. All countries of the region must have the opportunity to develop economically as well as socially. The key word is inclusiveness.

As EU Presidency, we did our best to support the **inclusive regional cooperation**. We encouraged the local stakeholders to take part in the cooperation procedures. However, it is true that **no EU initiative can replace the good will of all sides** and the effort that shall be vested mainly by the local players.

Integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the European Union **does not** in any way **contradict** their **mutual good relations** within the region. On the contrary, one of the unwritten integration criteria concerns the ability of the countries in the region to strengthen the regional dimension of their cooperation and to foster an atmosphere in which they can work together. After all, the **efforts of individual countries** cannot be based on mutual competition, but should instead **be based on** the precise opposite: **cooperation, use of best practices and sharing of experience**. I am sure that Serbia understands this and will continue to act as the best promoter and integrating element of regional initiatives.

It is very important, that the **accession negotiations of the EU with Croatia** are **back on track** and might be concluded relatively soon, possibly this year. It is an example of a positive impetus and motivation. Despite sensitivities of relations in the region, due to the painful past, it should show a clear sense of vested vigorous effort to reforms and harmonisation of the national systems with the acquis of the EU.

We follow very carefully the **development in other countries of the region**, and not everywhere is the situation completely satisfactory, in spite of the considerable effort made by many stakeholders. It shows clearly, that the absence of political dialogue is the first reason for very limited progress on meeting the conditions of the European integration.

As for **Kosovo**, disregarding diverging views on its status, I believe that it is of utmost importance for the whole region, that Kosovo citizens are given a chance to enjoy economic and social development.

Deputy Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen,

we wholeheartedly share Serbia's vision of its membership of the EU. The final stage however will neither be achieved tomorrow, nor *gratis*. No matter how laborious the process would be, it is clear that the results are worth the effort. As a way of conclusion I reiterate our conviction that the **EU integration is a challenging process, with criteria, benchmarks, progress reports, technical assessments etc. Nonetheless, the vision is not to be forgotten.** Integrating the Western Balkans into the EU is the final piece of reuniting Europe after the wars and turmoil of the 20th century. **If the 20th century nightmares started in Sarajevo in 1914, let end these spectres there 100 years later thereafter.**

Thank you for your attention.