

Address by the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic Mr. Miloslav Vlček - COSAC 11 MAY 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

It is an honour to meet you here on the occasion of the 41st Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union.

I do not regard this conference merely as an obligatory event as part of the Czech Republic's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. I view it as the culmination of this important period. Above all because you are here in Prague as the representatives of committees that are concerned with European affairs, which is naturally a key issue for us.

There may – and certainly will – be various opinions on the Czech Presidency. Far be it from me to judge the full breadth of all the activities during our Presidency. As far, however, as the parliamentary dimension is concerned, my assessment is positive, and not only because all of the planned meetings have taken place. Above all I consider the topics covered by all the discussions to be important, as they examined the key themes at present and explored ways of approaching them. That has ultimately been confirmed by the positive responses to the meetings for the chairpersons of the security, foreign affairs, budget and finance committees, and to the parliamentary conference on “Current Challenges for European Security”. Equally the 66th Transatlantic Dialogue, which was held at the Chamber of Deputies with the participation of American congressmen and members of the European Parliament, was a valuable contribution to discussions on the problems currently facing Europe and the world. Other such activities have included the meeting of the chairpersons of the lower houses of parliament of the Troika, namely France, the Czech Republic

and Sweden, as well as Spain, which will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2010. Joint parliamentary discussions with the European Parliament were also significant, as was the EU – ACP meeting.

In essence all of those meetings covered the two main themes of the Czech Presidency: the economy, and Europe and the world.

Your conference can also be placed in that context. It is a response to the current situation, but also an opportunity for us to look to more distant horizons.

One more aspect should be mentioned: during our Presidency we have paid more attention to communication between the national parliaments and with the European Parliament. I have noticed that trend, and the need to increase such communication and make it more effective, for some time now – at least since June last year, when the chairpersons of the parliaments of the EU member states met in Lisbon.

That is by no means merely a matter of discussing measures that would allow national parliaments to become respected partners of EU institutions, above all the European Commission and the European Parliament.

Nor is it concerned merely with discussing how national parliaments should work together more effectively and how they should exchange information on their standpoints and other matters. The discussions I have talked about have been primarily aimed at the most important issues at present, at working together to find ways to respond to the challenges that Europe faces now and will face in the future. In other words the system for cooperation and communication will not be effective if it does not focus on contemporary issues

in the life of our continent, and on its relations with the rest of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

These are important times for Europe. If we look back at the past we can see the milestones in the life of our continent. Sixty years ago the Council of Europe was formed. Five years ago ten new countries, including the Czech Republic, became members of the EU. We can trace the gradual transformation of the European Coal and Steel Community into the European Union, which now brings together twenty-seven countries on this continent. We can see how more and more has been added to the Community, one of the first foundation stones of the integration process.

This conference is, however, taking place at a time that is far from straightforward. The economic recession and the financial crisis have significantly influenced life in the individual states and the European Union as a whole.

What should Europe do in these times? Above all it must stay united. It has to integrate more and work together to counter the crisis. That is why I voted in favour of the Treaty of Lisbon in the Chamber of Deputies.

The EU and its member states should take advantage of overcoming this crisis to demonstrate their solidarity. The current crisis is not merely a financial, economic or social crisis, but a crisis of our certainty, confidence and values. And it is solidarity, our belonging to the European Community, that will allow us to gradually overcome these difficult times.

Finding answers to these and many other questions deserves Europe-wide communication, thought and discussion. This, the 41st Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union, is one such opportunity. I wish this conference constructive discussion and new inspiration and impulses.

Thank you for listening.