

## Rede von Staatsminister Michael Roth bei der Veranstaltung 'Czech Republic and Germany: Partners for a European Future' am 18.06.2014 in Prag

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es gilt das gesprochene Wort  
Vice-Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, Excellences, distinguished guests, friends, It is a great pleasure to be here in Prague today. 2014 brings back very painful but on the other hand also very joyful memories. 2014 is a special year of several anniversaries which all have an impact on the shape of Europe and of the European Union today. We look back to the dark chapters and catastrophes of the 20th century such as the outbreak of the First World War 100 years ago and the outbreak of the Second World War 75 years ago. But there are also some happier and more euphoric moments to remember: 25 years ago the division of Europe came to an end when citizens in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Europe brought down communist governments. What a great moment! Just recently we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Czech Republic joining the EU, which is a great success story. This success belongs to political leaders like the visionary Václav Havel and citizens who had to make hard sacrifices and difficult adjustments on the way to freedom, democracy, rule of law and free market economies. 25 years ago, the streets here in Prague were crowded with Trabis, Ladas and Wartburgs left behind by citizens of the former GDR on their way to the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. A tree in the Embassys park was covered with keys to abandoned cars and flats. As someone who grew up only 500m from the inner-German border between Hesse and Thuringia, I am still grateful for the support of the people of former Czechoslovakia during these days and weeks. And today I can say for sure that relations between our countries have never been better. Federal President Joachim Gaucks recent visit to the Czech Republic was extremely encouraging, as was the visit of Prime Minister Sobotka to Berlin this March. The accession of the Czech Republic to the EU is a success in every sense and moreover, a success for both sides. Before coming to where we stand as partners in the EU today, and which steps still need to be taken together, let me first say two things:  
1. It is not the size of a country that matters in the EU: it is about ideas, creativity and a pro-European commitment to making the EU stronger as a whole.  
2. Thus, the realignment of Czech-European policy and the pro-European commitment your government has already shown within the first weeks is encouraging for the EU as a whole. I very much welcome that the Czech Government decided to join the fiscal compact and is no longer requesting an opt-out from the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Considering the widespread EU-scepticism among citizens in various EU member states - in Germany as well as in the Czech Republic - I admire and wholeheartedly welcome the path your government has taken. However, the European elections have been a wake-up call: eurosceptic - sometimes anti-integration - parties gaining influence in the European Parliament have shown governments all over Europe that, as it seems, we have not been able to fully explain to our citizens what the European project is all about and why Europe is more relevant than ever in providing solutions to the challenges that we still face. It seems that Czech voters took this into account when the majority of them voted for EU-friendly parties. However, the low turnout at the elections shows that we still have to do more to convince voters that their vote counts. In recent years, most European member states have experienced a profound economic and financial crisis. Some were affected more than others but we were definitely hit by a tremendous financial and economic crisis. And we will all have to deal with the economic and social consequences for a long time to come. The situation in Eastern Ukraine is extremely fragile and continues to concern us all greatly. We have to deal with a fear that we thought was long gone: a new division in Europe. More than 60 years of peace, democracy and freedom is a huge achievement. But we seem to be taking all these achievements more and more for granted. It appears that confidence in the European project is waning whilst Europe remains at a crossroads. We are at a time of great uncertainty in Europe in every sense. We cannot afford this uncertainty if we want the EU to remain capable of acting as a global player, capable of acting as a safeguard for democracy and economic and social stability, capable of being a role model for other parts of the world. European integration is the answer to the challenges described, as well as to globalisation. Germany and the Czech Republic share a responsibility to work for a better EU.  
Firstly, a united stance with regard to what happens in Ukraine as well as an unequivocal message to Moscow is necessary in order to make clear that it is our shared values and the rule of law that prevail in Europe, not the law of force. We cannot accept a destabilisation of our common neighbourhood. The successful Presidential elections have been a milestone for stabilising Ukraine. The new President faces major challenges. Rebuilding the trust of Eastern Ukrainians in the Central Government in Kyiv is by no means an easy task. The national dialogue and constitutional reforms must continue. Moreover, reforms to fight corruption and to strengthen the rule of law are urgently needed. We will only be capable of solving this crisis if we remain united and speak with a single voice. I would thus like to extend my gratitude to the Visegrád Group and its member states for their efforts to contribute to a peaceful solution. Your experience with tackling the transformation of economic, political, societal and social systems constitutes a crucial contribution. Secondly, our citizens expect the EU to be operational and capable of acting soon after the elections. The last thing Europe needs now is a lengthy debate on personnel and institutional questions, which most of the population will hardly understand. The EU has made enormous efforts to manage and overcome the debt crisis. We have taken important steps to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union: the European Stability Mechanism has been established, an ambitious pact for growth and employment has been adopted, a compromise on the banking union has been reached. And furthermore we have agreed on a fiscal compact, which was joined by most of the non-euro-states as well. I am very glad that the Czech Republic has also taken the decision to participate - this sends a strong signal of European unity and shows that the non-euro-states are taking part in the joint efforts to solve the crisis. Let me be clear: I am convinced that the Eurozone needs to take further steps to be more immune to such a crisis in the future whilst remaining a transparent club which is open to new members. However, apart from focusing on stabilising the eurozone in the past, in recent months we have also stepped up our efforts to promote growth and employment. There is no doubt that we must do more. A particularly pressing problem is the high level of youth unemployment in some EU member states. We must do our utmost to ensure that especially the young generation does not see the European Union as a problem, but as part of the solution. We must find a way to live up to the real social dimension of the European Union. In the European Parliament in 1973, Willy Brandt said: "In the early years the time was perhaps not yet ripe for greater emphasis on social objectives reaching beyond national boundaries." Well, I think the time has now come - over four decades have passed since then. And indeed, the idea of a social market economy has not only shown success on the national level in the last century. In my opinion it deserves to be further developed for Europe in the 21st century. What I mean is fair, democratic and socially functioning markets which are committed to prosperity for all. Social cohesion is necessary in order to achieve long-term growth and stability in Europe. We would betray the European ideal if we allowed a new division between rich and poor member countries which would separate Europe again. Our European political, economic and social model can only be successful in the face of global competition if we concentrate on an agenda of growth, competitiveness and employment which brings about an inherent social agenda: a strengthened Economic and Monetary Union which solidifies the unity of the 28, common answers to climate change and energy policy, a general strengthening of our space for freedom, security and the rule of law as well as a joint policy on a transatlantic and global level. Thirdly, twenty-five years ago, people behind the iron curtain showed us how to tear down walls. Together with other Central and Eastern European countries you have paved the way for freedom and democracy. That is also why we need to retain our credibility when our fundamental values such as the rule of law, democracy, minority rights, the freedom of press come under threat within our community. The EU is in the first instance a union of values! I do hope that we all work together to put more emphasis on protecting these values, particularly when I look at the Maidan or Taksim square. Belonging to this Union of values is the driving force behind the hope of the people on the Maidan or Taksim square, much as it was 25 years ago in the Central and Eastern European countries. And as the great European Václav Havel said: "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."  
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