

**Prepared remarks of H.E. Karel Schwarzenberg, Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic
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Excellencies, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It has been three months since my colleague and friend Bernard Kouchner addressed the audience at Brookings on behalf of the Presidency of the European Union. It was a time of transition of the presidencies in the United States, and Bernard elaborated on potentially big topics of the transatlantic relationship in the future. This transitional period is now over. You have a new president who is quickly building his administration. And I am pleased to be back here today, as a guest of Brookings and Heinrich Boell Foundation, to speak about a fresh start of the relationship between Europeans and Americans.

I want to congratulate Brookings on offering its intellectual potential and leading the discussion about new directions in American and international affairs. We do follow closely your studies, proposals, advice and healthy criticism so useful to the new administration. I think Strobe Talbott, the President of Brookings, will have a tough time replacing those brilliant and talented experts who will leave Brookings to serve in the new administration.

I also want to congratulate America and the American people. For many months, the world was watching with fascination your democracy at work. After long primaries and tough elections you made a very bold choice. Your vote for President Obama, your vote for change, is a strong statement about the character of the United States.

We, Europeans, welcome your President and his new administration with great enthusiasm. And Vice-President Biden at Munich last weekend proved that the tone was changing. This really is a defining moment for the transatlantic relationship. The United States may have global responsibility, but we, Europeans, have our share as well. The new administration declared it wanted to renew relationship with Allies. We in Europe welcome this. Because, as Secretary Clinton so rightly said in her Senate Confirmation Hearing “when America and Europe work together, global objectives are well within our means”.

We also welcomed that the very first steps of President Obama were to sign orders to close Guantanamo. It shows that Human Rights and principles of human dignity will have a prominent place on his agenda. This is a symbol of strength of the new administration.

We, Czechs, are very lucky to hold this responsible position of *primus inter pares* at the time when the new administration is making its first steps. I feel privileged to be able to introduce the EU to our new partners in Washington as a closest friend.

We have an ambitious agenda, a lot of substance and full calendar of meetings. We would like to see two EU – US summits during our tenure. In addition to the regular Troika Summit meeting here in Washington, we extended an invitation to President Obama to visit Prague and meet informally the Heads of State and Government of the 27 EU Countries and the President of the

European Commission. It is our firm belief that he should meet not only with NATO and G-20 but also with the EU.

The symbolism of a Summit in Prague cannot be lost on anyone: 20 years after the fall of Communism to which the United States contributed so much, 10 years after the Washington Summit where the Czech Republic participated as a full-fledged member of NATO for the first time, 5 years after our accession to the European Union.

Symbolism alone would not be enough. There are, of course, important issues of substance to be addressed at a Prague Summit. The synergy of European and American goals in many areas could set the ground for establishing in Prague the guidelines of an ambitious common agenda meant to effectively address world challenges.

Besides common political action in the many troubled spots of the world, we look forward to cooperating in the field of economy, internal security, global climate change and others. And maybe time has also come to review the formal ways in which our partnership operates. We can have a fresh look at the conceptual basis of partnership too, and think about refreshment of the New Transatlantic Agenda.

As you may be aware, the Czech Presidency identified 3 Es as its priorities, namely Economy, Energy and External relations. In external relations, we chose to focus on the transatlantic relationship, the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Of course, that does not mean we will forget other parts of the world. We would not be allowed to do so – the EU Presidency comes with the function of the European Fire Fighter-in-Chief thrown in. Experience told us to anticipate a crisis – and we did. This proved to be quite useful because we got not one but two crises at the same time. From the first hours of our Presidency we had to cope with the interruption of gas supplies from Russia through Ukraine to Europe and also with the offensive of Israel against Hamas.

The long-term challenges in the Middle East remain pressing and daunting. Yet, with willingness of the new U.S. administration to devote itself to the Middle East crisis, we are sure that working together will bring about the right results. We welcome the speed with which the new administration engaged in the region and we appreciate the nomination of such a distinguished statesman as Senator George Mitchell as the Special Envoy. The EU looks forward to working with him.

As I have just said, the conflict in Gaza marked the beginning of our Presidency. The EU actively sought to facilitate the cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire and to deliver humanitarian aid to the suffering people there as soon as possible. The citizens of the State of Israel have the right to secure and peaceful lives; and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have the right to live in an independent democratic state with viable borders, sharing peace and prosperity with Israel. We believe that the path toward the two-state solution is still open. We believe that the Quartet's conditions presented to Hamas as our requirements for further discussions remain valid too. And we believe that the International Conference in Cairo in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, to be hosted by Egypt on 2 March with the full support of the EU as a co-sponsor, will generate not only the humanitarian and reconstruction aid needed but also political goodwill on all sides to move ahead with reconciliation and the peace process.

The Obama administration knows what it means to “*hit the ground running*”. Now, we know it too. Together with the crisis in Gaza, we started our EU Presidency with an interruption of gas supplies from Russia through Ukraine to Europe in the middle of the winter. The gas crisis was a wake-up call for many in Europe. Had we not identified the topic of energy and energy security as one of our priorities, it would have identified itself.

Energy has become one of the main topics of Paneuropean political discussion. We need to finish the liberalization of the energy market. We need more diversification of resources. We need to build more interconnectors in Europe, and improve our infrastructure to be reversible where needed. We need to think about storage capacity and the use of sea terminals for liquified natural gas. This time of financial crisis, when your Congress is considering a stimulus package, and the European Commission has prepared the European Recovery Plan, is a time of opportunities to move forward with infrastructure projects. As the EU, we can do a lot to increase our mutual solidarity – which is the core idea of European integration – and consider the creation of Supply Crisis Response Mechanisms. We also need to talk to our partners, Russia and Ukraine, more thoroughly about how to increase the transparency and security of such a strategic part of the economy as energy. We can find tools within the “post-Partnership and Cooperation Agreements” with both countries, and we can focus on projects to improve the energy sector within the Eastern Partnership initiative we are already preparing.

Discussion on energy security has many dimensions: from strategy, geopolitics and economy to the discussion on global climate change. As a Minister nominated for the Green Party, I believe we have to have fresh look at how we use and produce energy. In Europe, we set ambitious goals to achieve more environmentally friendly economic growth, and I see that this awakening is coming to the United States too. Even during this short stay in Washington DC, I noticed that the structure of your car fleet has changed over last year. As we prepare for the Copenhagen summit, we need to have the United States on board and we welcome that the Obama administration is moving quickly in this direction. We need to cooperate on environmentally friendly technologies, share them with the developing countries and engage in a truly global discussion.

It is clear that the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Russia, will continue to feature prominently on our agenda. However, there are other areas in the world where our cooperation is needed and where transatlantic cooperation can make a lot of difference.

President Obama said that Afghanistan should also be at the center of our attention. And we agree. The mission that NATO performs in Afghanistan defines the role as well as the future of the Atlantic Alliance, the most successful military alliance in history. For us who have invested so much in the strength and solidity of the Atlantic Alliance, it is inconceivable to tarnish it with failure in its most important mission. In Afghanistan, we fight not only for the future of the Afghan people, but also for the future of NATO, for the future of the alliance between the United States and Europe, for our common and shared security.

The path is clearly uphill now. The insurgency is growing and the security situation is worsening. Yet, with the new determination of the Obama administration to focus on Afghanistan with a comprehensive political and regional approach, we, Europeans, should be ready to answer the call for renewed partnership.

And the Czech Presidency is resolved to confirm that the EU has its role in Afghanistan. Our police mission there, if improved and strengthened, can contribute to the vital areas of the rule of law and fight against corruption that lies at the core of any strategy aiming to tackle not only symptoms but also causes of the current crisis in Afghanistan. We share with the US administration the emphasis on the regional and comprehensive approach, where military force is needed to keep stability. But the key to success is the improvement of lives of the Afghan people. And the EU is well fit to use its development aid mechanisms, tools to improve the rule of law, help in justice reform. We hear the message from Washington on Afghanistan and around the EU table there is a consensus that this is a place we want to work hard.

Nothing proves the globalized character of current challenges more than the global financial and economic crisis. The world was shocked by the cascade of events on financial markets and by the reaction of economies, which were hit with incredible speed. The crisis may have opened a new chapter of economic history, but we firmly believe that free market should remain at the core of world economy. Yes, we need better regulation but this does not necessarily mean more regulation. We should avoid protectionism, which could spread as an infection throughout the weakened world economy, now in convalescence. The motto of the Czech Presidency is “Europe without barriers” and we want to translate it also to “transatlantic relations without barriers”, including economic.

Two years ago, during the German Presidency, we created the Transatlantic Economic Council as a forum for economic dialogue between the EU and the U.S. We believe that it is a very useful tool we can use to strengthen our strategic dialogue on economy and also to give a voice to the community of transatlantic businesses.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One would be hard pressed to find an area, where a close and intensive cooperation between the European Union and the United States would not be needed. Today’s world is getting smaller and the more responsible partners there are, the better. Strong transatlantic partnership built on a strong tradition and shared values has the ability to continuously transform the world into a better place.

It is obvious to me that we, Europeans, do not have a many friends who would be closer to us than the United States. And I hope that the United States still feels the same about Europe. In sum: the world is waiting, the atmosphere is right, and we are ready. So let us seize the opportunity and let’s get working.

Thank you for your attention.