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A CENTRAL EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

A CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC BOHUSLAV SOBOTKA

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Featured Speaker:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. EISEN: Good morning. Welcome to the Brookings Institution for the latest in the series of distinguished speakers that we have welcomed to our building on this 100th anniversary year of Brookings. I'm very pleased that today to welcome my friend, Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka of the Czech Republic to address us on the challenges that are facing Europe and the EU as we meet here this morning. The Prime Minister is here for the President's Nuclear Security Summit, and has agreed to address us.

Prime Minister Sobotka's career parallels the history of the modern Czech Republic starting with the fall of communism in 1989. He has been a member of the CSSD, the Czech Social Democratic Party, since December of 1989, exactly when the late President Havel was assuming the leadership of then Czechoslovakia. Prime Minister Sobotka participated in the renewal of the Czech Social Democratic activities in Brno and in the Vyskov District. He's the co-founder of the Young Social Democrats which he started in 1990.

In 1996 he was elected for the first time to the Czech Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, as the CSSD, the Social Democratic candidate for the South Bohemian Region. He has been reelected to that position in 1998, 2002, 2006, and 2010. From 1998 until 2010 he has been a leader of the Social Democratic Movement. He served as the Minister of Finance. He has served as the Deputy Prime Minister. Has been the Chairman of the Budget Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, and the Vice Chairman of the CSSD. He's headed the important committees of the Parliament, assumed his position as chairman of the CSSD in March 2011.

As we are in the American political season and getting ready for our conventions, I vividly remember while serving as ambassador attending all of the political

conventions, including the one in which the Prime Minister was selected to chair the CSSD, and a tough political battle. So he is a graduate of the faculty of law at Masaryk University, and is now emerged not only as an important leader in the Czech Republic and in Central Europe, but as we will hear from the Prime Minister, the Czech's are playing a crucial, stabilizing role in facing the challenges that are confronting the EU, and in dealing with the challenges that the Trans-Atlantic Alliance and our allies are confronting around the world. With that, I give you Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka.

MR. SOBOTKA: Ladies and gentlemen, one year and four months ago I had the honor of unveiling the bust of Vaclav Havel in the capital building. Vaclav Havel who was the symbol of the fall of communism and building a free and democratic society in our country. In my speech I quoted several times from his famous address to the U.S. Congress of 1990, in February of 1990. I firmly believe that you wouldn't mind if I use the same address of the Czechoslovakian president as my inspiration today as well.

Havel spoke about his vision of Europe which should be built on the foundations of general respect for human rights, political pluralism, and freedom of choice. He spoke about Europe in which borders will play lesser and lesser role until they become needed no more. This vision of his saw his fulfillment at the end of his life already. Europe gained stability not only in the Central and Eastern countries, but also in the West Balkans which saw a lot of bloodshed in the 90s.

The Schengen Area, which makes it possible to travel freely throughout the EU, finally spread to the total of 26 member states. Unfortunately, as I said once before, none of these achievements is a matter of course. Recently, this fact has been reviled quite clearly. Europe today struggles with problems on many fronts. Greek debt crisis, illegal annexation of Crimea, and military destabilization of Eastern Ukraine by Russia, civil war in Syria, so called Islamic State, terrorism inspired by the Islamic State

and migration/refugee crisis. All of these problems impact, in a major way, our thinking as well as the political reality of Europe. Although, they don't constitute our biggest problem.

Our biggest problem is the state of some kind of a permanent crisis management. The feeling that we don't have the events fully under control, and that Europe is not capable of following its own rules far too often. A great number of Europeans are disappointed today and fear the future developments. There are growing nationalistic tendencies as well as demand for radical solutions.

The result of this situation is not only the presence of dangerous radicals in many national parliaments, but also increasing discussions on disintegration and delusion of the EU. The most visible example of the above is a possible Brexit, i.e., the UK leaving the EU which, if it comes to pass, could become a major turning point in the European cooperation following the Second World War

The internal cohesion of Europe is truly at stake here. This cohesion has been painstakingly built and negotiated since the 50s of the last century, and culminated with the European Union enlargement by the states of the former Soviet bloc, including the Czech Republic. No European country is today able to successfully face the challenges and tasks ahead of us alone, on its own, and in isolation from the others.

We live in an interconnected world, and unless we want to see Europe marginalized we must face the challenges together. Therefore, me and my government fully embrace the idea of European integration and deepening of cooperation within the EU. Face to face, with the mentioned challenges, the Pan-European cooperation is the only choice conducive to stability, prosperity, preservation of the role of Europe plays in the world and values upon which it has been built.

Ladies and gentlemen, Brookings Institute celebrates its 100 year

anniversary. During the 100 years of your existence you became one of the most significant think tanks in the U.S. and even beyond. You house experts in all different areas of today's society which have changed over time and will continue changing. Some of you specialize in international relations, and therefore, you know much more than me about the reasons behind the events moving the world around us. Therefore, I think it would be better rather than giving you numbers and statistics regarding the individual events to focus on what I, as the Prime Minister of a 10 million country in the heart of Europe, consider as key areas on which we must concentrate and devote our attention to.

To stop the migration chaos we must renew an efficient and functional protection of the outer EU borders, as well as, stabilize the regions in its vicinity. Concurrently, we must never forget the humanitarian dimension of the current situation and the fact that many of those who flee to Europe try to escape a war conflict and terror. And it is our duty to help them. Europe must be more decisive and more action like. We must realize that we don't tackle the problems actively ourselves. There's no one else to do it for us and in our stead.

We also need sincerity when identifying the problems brought about by often times poorly handled integration of the previous types of immigrants from Muslim countries to the majority European societies, and sincerity is precisely what is required at the beginning of each solution. The root cause of today's migration crisis are most of all the destabilized and disintegrated countries whose citizens lost their life prospects or hope for life prospects. If we intend to resolve this crisis our primary task is to help bring about peace in such countries such as Syria, Libya, and Iraq and their socioeconomic rejuvenation.

What is also key is a direct cooperation in the very regions. The Czech

Republic is the presiding country of the Visharad Group formed by Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Czech Republic itself has been very proactive in pushing for help and assistance to countries impacted by the migration crisis the most. Not only in Europe, while we focus on Macedonia and Greece, but also in the Middle East where our aid is provided to Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. Even our assistance to Syria directly is not negligible. Czech Republic is the only EU member state with a still functioning embassy in Damascus, and the contacts that we maintain have priceless value for our allies, and help organize humanitarian aid right on the spot in the war stricken regions.

I'm proud that the Czech Republic with its historic experience and central geographic position in Europe clearly shows that it intends to play a constructive role in the process of European integration and security. I suppose that you will agree with me that in times which are difficult as we experience that we should maintain our relations with allies who we share common goals and values with, and therefore, I believe that one of the major priorities is the deepening of the Trans-Atlantic cooperation and cooperation within the NATO. The security architecture cannot be imagined without this cooperation. Strategic partnership between the EU and the United States should be deepened and should impact other areas of politics as well, not only just security and defense.

Also, the negotiations on Trans-Atlantic commercial agreement is one more proof of it, and I hope to see a very well balanced text that will be beneficial for both parties. Nevertheless, even here, it is equally valid to say that we consider and regard the Trans-Atlantic partnership as a matter of course and as something that is going to stay here for the future automatically. I think that this might be rather short-sighted, and even for the future it might prove to be dangerous. On both sides of the Atlantic we can hear influential voices undermining the Trans-Atlantic partnership. I believe that investment into this cooperation is very much needed not only through political capital,

but also by strengthening contact between common Europeans and Americans. We must raise the interest in what is happening on each side of the Atlantic, foster the willingness to listen to each other, and realize the significance of this partnership.

That is also why I came on my official visit to the United States of America. In the close of my speech, let me thank you ladies and gentlemen for your invitation. It is my great honor to speak in the premises of such prestigious organizations such as the Brookings Institute, and I would like to sincerely congratulate you on your anniversary and wish you another 100 years. Under the famous slogan of quality, independence, and impact. Thank you very much for your attention.

MR. EISEN: Thank you Prime Minister for your kind words about Brookings and for your incisive analysis of the challenges facing Europe, and really facing the world. One of the great lessons of the past 100 years of our history is that Europe, and in particular Central Europe, do not exist in isolation, and the events that have taken place, that have started in your region, World War I, World War II, the fall of communism have had global impacts. We're seeing a series of global issues now that implicate the region.

I'd like to start, if I may, with your strong words about Czech Republic assistance in pushing back on the chaos in the Middle East, and I'd like to focus you, if I may, on Daesh, on ISIS. Yesterday's news included the information that the Czech Republic is going to be on the ground helping to support the Iraqi military and its flight capacities, including with the L-159 planes that were one of the issues getting them to Iraq. It was one of the issues we worked on together when I was serving in Prague. Can you tell us a little bit more about that mission and about how the Czech Republic will push back on Daesh?

MR. SOBOTKA: We are a part of coalition of more than 60 countries

who try to actively fight Daesh. The Czech Republic provided repeatedly in the past two years, a supply of ammunition, as well as weapons for the Iraqi Army, and the weapons have been distributed through the Central Iraqi government, and they're also provided directly to the Kurdish fighters who actually gained significant victories in the north of Iraq against Daesh.

I'm very happy that the Czech Republic made it possible for the Iraqi Army to buy the L-150 jet planes that will increase the capacity of the Iraqi Army. It will also train the pilots of the Iraqi Army. So a few days ago my government approved the presence of our military advisory team that will be directly deployed in Iraq helping the Iraqi Army. It is a direct support through weapons, ammunition, training, and we also are ready to cooperate in a number of other projects that will increase the capacity of the Iraqi State to fight against Daesh.

The fact that Daesh spread so significantly and so far and so fast, it actually demonstrates the fact that there are evident weaknesses that need to be fixed on the side of the legitimate regime in Iraq, and in order to be able to defeat Daesh we really have to focus on a number of fronts to provide humanitarian aid, train the military, as well as rejuvenate economy, as well as stability in the region. Because what we see is that we really need to rebuild the countries which disintegrated into nothing in a matter of few months or years and rebuild a structure. Because I think that Daesh, in many times, actually doubled the missing governmental structure. So by rebuilding those countries we will be also combating Daesh very efficiently.

MR. EISEN: The Czech Republic, of course, as you mentioned, has continued to play a critical role in Syria, keeping your embassy open in Syria, Ambassador Filipi one of the great heroes of the global ambassadorial core for hanging in there. How do you see the situation in Syria as unfolding? Are you personally

optimistic that the cease fire, with all of its flaws, is going to lead to more stability?

The Czech Republic has unique eyes on the situation, I will say. Myself speaking to Ambassador Filipi both when I served in Prague and continuing to speak with her. She's a very acute analyst of the situation. So we're curious to hear from you the Czech view on the prospects for Syrian improvement?

MR. SOBOTKA: I think that the Syria question or the Syria issue is not easy at all. I think a problem that we partly caused ourselves is that this war has been going for far too long, and it is clear that following the five years of the civil war there is a great number of individuals who are losing patience, losing hope, fleeing the country. We, as the Czech Republic, we have been always very active in the region of the Central European Union. In fact, we have a network of our embassies, including the mentioned embassy in Damascus, and Mrs. Filipi has really done a great work, heroic work, truly, and she only doesn't serve the interest of the Czech Republic, but the European Union as well.

Syria actually lost almost half of its inhabitants because half of the inhabitants are on the run. They left Syria for Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and even directly in Europe today. We are trying to provide help and assistance in refugee camps as well. We see this as a very important way to show solidarity and provide a partial solution to the refugee crisis by really providing aid in refugee camps. I personally visited some of those ports and in relation to what is happening even in Europe and a great number of places a great part of Syrian refugees actually do not want to stay in Europe. They want to come back. They want their children to get their education, to live in a free country. They don't want to join the army on either side. They just want to have a peaceful, prosperous life.

Of course, peace negotiations in Syria are not going to be easy. I think it

is very important to respect the reality that exists there, and I think in terms of long term stability it will be required to see President Assad leaving and the process that will lead into it should involve a dialogue of all parties involved in the process. I, myself, am not a big optimist as far as the speed of the process is concerned. However, what we saw in the past few months, such as, for instance, achieving the cease fire, and, in fact, to a great extent a kind of willingness to really maintain the cease fire. It gives us very good hope or very good prospects. But now it will require all the parties involved to look for a pragmatic, practical solution, and really organize or put in place a government that will be really able to gain the trust and confidence, and also provide stability for the people of Syria.

MR. EISEN: I characterize that as cautiously and patiently optimistic.

MR. SOBOTKA: Well, I don't think there's no other way to handle the migration crisis then stopping the war in Syria and finding a large scale agreement amongst the Syrian citizens. And this citizen or this consensus has to really have the elements or involve the elements of the political camp of the current president. In fact, this front that the Syrian population has to agree upon has to be as general as possible, and as wide as possible because otherwise we'll not really be able to stop the refugee crisis. In fact, the people of Syria have to trust in the new peace making process in Syria otherwise they will be afraid to come back to Syria.

MR. EISEN: Poignant antidote about talking to the Syrian refugees. It is true, of course, that many of them would like to return to their homeland, but to a homeland that's at peace. However we characterize your description of what's needed in Syria, I think that that stability, everyone agrees, is not close at hand.

In light of that, can you share with us a little bit the attitudes of the people of the Czech Republic? There has been some strong resistance to welcoming refugees.

Can you reflect on that a little bit? Explain where that is coming from and share your perspective, please?

MR. SOBOTKA: Well, if you're in a situation in which the borders of Europe you have a very active terrorist infrastructure which is represented by Daesh. Today you can't really be cautious enough about your security and defense. Even if we deal with the refugee humanitarian crisis. So, in fact, we are basically fighting on both fronts. We have to provide humanitarian aid and help the refugees, but at the same time, to make sure that, you know, we provide security and defend our outer borders.

But I think that the biggest option would be if we basically are not diligent in providing protection and we cannot be naïve. We cannot ignore the fact that right at the border with the European Union there's a terrorist infrastructure organization that is able to send their terrorists to Europe and sponsor terrorism all across Europe, and they are able to sponsor various organizations. We saw it in Paris. We saw it in Belgium repeatedly. People in Europe are afraid.

People are afraid for three reasons. First of all, they're afraid of Europe not being able to manage the migration, so it's the management problem or the management mistrust. So the borders were not ready for this strong tide of refugees. So first of all, the Europeans are afraid of Europe not being able to handle the refugee crisis. Then, number two, is fear of death, basically, or fear of being threatened by terrorist attacks. And then third is our inability to integrate immigrants from Muslim countries in certain European locations.

It shows that although the first generation of the Muslim refugees or immigrants, if you were all Muslims who came to Europe. They were integrated successfully into the labor market, into the society, but the problem usually starts with the second and third generations. There is a big danger of radicalization of the second or

third generation of the Muslim immigrants in Europe, and Europe has to be ready to respond to it.

Of course, we have to refute the principle of collective guilt. There should be no tendency to put all Muslims in one group and label them all terrorists. That would be the worst possible approach. So in order to be able to discard this principle of ascribing blame to one group of individuals without any difference we really have to do our work, and we really have to be able to prosecute individuals for violating laws and combat terrorism.

Obviously, there are certain countries, such as, for instance, Slovakia or Hungary, who are opposed to the approach of Germany, but that was mainly because we were putting more emphasis on the security and defense aspect. Czech Republic accepts refugees. We are ready to help. But at the same time, we try to adhere to high security and screening principles in order not to give cheap ammunition to populists and nationalists who actually further thwart and hamper a successful solution of the problems that we are facing. Therefore, I believe that democratic politicians have to respond to the legitimate fear of the European citizens because if the democratic politicians are not able to answer it then they will create a space for populists and other extremists.

MR. EISEN: Of course it's a -- the problem you describe of balancing the imperatives of human rights and political situation is one that has bedeviled Europe over the past 100 years. We were speaking before. I'm writing about this cycle now. If we had more time I would engage you on what President Havel would counsel in striking this balance, particularly since you started with President Havel. But I want to ask you a different question and then I'm going to turn to the audience for questions, so the audience should be ready with your questions.

Speaking about the borders of Europe, Russia, of Vladimir Putin has

been responsible in Crimea and in Ukraine for the most significant intrusions, violations of the principle of borders and sovereignty in many, many decades. And the Czech Republic has stood together with the United States and with Europe in sanctioning Putin and Russia. You alluded to this, of course, in your remarks, but can you tell us a little bit more about how the sanctions are working? Will the European consensus hold? And do you have a view on whether the sanctions will be successful? What would the definition of success be? Exiting Ukraine?

MR. SOBOTKA: Well, I think this is one of the major questions, because all we talk about, in fact, is that worsened in the past years a security situation in the direct vicinity of the EU. Ukraine is one of those. Of course, I will come back to Ukraine in detail in a short while, but I should not, and I don't want to forget, one important note that I wanted to make. You mentioned some important dates and events that are related to the history of Central and Eastern Europe, and often times they are very much intertwined with the history of the Czech Republic or Czechoslovakia, if you will, in the past.

I believe that it is of paramount of importance, and I also mention it in my speech, and that is the significance of Trans-Atlantic cooperation, and partnership between the EU and the United States of America. I think it is important for the United States of America, in spite of their own interpolitical problems, challenges, priorities, and issues, should not forget about what is happening in Europe. Because what, in the 20th century, took place in Central Europe always had an impact on the global level.

Whatever happened in 1914 in the Central Europe and in the Balkans it started the First World War. What happened in Germany and Central Europe in 1939 or in the 30s, it started the Second World War. What happened in the 60s, including the Prop Spring in 1968 in Central Europe, actually enabled a fall of the communist regime

later on because this was the first time the communist regime lost its credibility by invading Prague with Soviet tanks. In 1989, again, is another important indication and a kind of lesson for the United States to realize that it is important to pay attention to what is happening in Europe.

So coming back to Ukraine. I'm very happy that the EU, so far, has been united on this issue. I think it is very important that there is enough coordination between the United States of America and the EU, and apart from sanctions, we need functional government in place in Ukraine. A number of countries provide support to the Ukrainian government. Half of the political situation in Ukraine is very, very unstable. There are many personnel changes, the replacements of ministers, and there's a lot of tension in the Ukraine in Parliament. So what we need in Ukraine is a stable government that will be a viable partner towards Russia when talking about the implementation of the MINSK agreements.

Also, internally they'll be able to execute reforms that will improve economic and social situations of people in Ukraine. When political changes happen in Ukraine the people that demonstrated in Maidan Square they waived the European flags. However, for many Ukrainians Europe is a symbol of a place with a higher standard of living, lower corruption than what they experience in the Ukraine, and a better life. That's why we saw those European flags there. However, the question is whether the democratic government or the democratically elected government in Ukraine is going to be able to provide positive changes: economic, social, and other to the citizens of Ukraine. If they're not able to do that then Russia will gain from it because they've been trying to destabilize the region for a long time.

So as far as the outcome of the sanctions or the success of the sanctions, what is important is that the sanctions are combined with the fulfillment of the

MINSK agreements. I'm very glad to see that the MINSK agreement has been started. This is the only alternative to discontinuation of the war in Eastern Ukraine because it was very important to stop people from dying in Eastern Ukraine, and we just need to see this crisis through. Unless the MINSK agreements are fulfilled and the European Union cannot unilaterally cancel the sanctions.

However, the sanctions and their fine tuning should always correspond to the level of fulfillment of the MINSK agreements. I believe that Europe has to stay unified shouldn't allow its division. And it's not easy for some of the European countries, including the Czech Republic, because a great number of Czech companies have economic interest in Russia and we export a lot of products and services to Russia. In fact, those companies complain, businessman complain, the business community complains. However, Europe needs to maintain a unified approach on this matter.

MR. EISEN: Not unlike the United States expanding, its attention to Asia, you, yourself, have just welcomed a state visit from China, and I think the economic opportunities in Asia offer somewhat of a safety valve for you and Europe as you continue to hold strong against the Russian aggression.

With that, I'm welcoming questions. You can ask questions here live in the audience at Brookings, and you also can send me questions on Twitter at Norm Eisen, and I will attempt to take a mix of the two. We should have -- yes, we have Grace with a microphone, and we will start here on the aisle. This gentleman. Another microphone coming from the back, very good.

QUESTIONER: -- by the June 2016 deadline?

MR. SOBOTKA: Well, the negotiations that we're conducting with Turkey are naturally related to trying to find a solution to the migration solution. But not only to it, they're not only limited to it. In the past few years, as a result of some of the

events in Turkey, Turkey has been getting further and further apart from Europe. We are convinced Turkey really plays an important role for the stabilization of the region, and therefore, there is a need to reinforce our communication with Turkey.

Turkey, by the way, is a member of NATO, and we actually need to see a close coordination of our approach to the tasks ahead such as the migration crisis. We're not taking here about a total visa deliberalization. It involves the possibility to cancel a short term Schengen visa which actually is valid for a period up to three months. So, in fact, for those who are intending to travel to Europe for more than three months would not be then required to ask for a visa. But, of course, it all depends on the fulfillment of those conditions by the Turks. Turks have, so far, not fulfilled all the conditions. However, they sent the signals that they would like to have those conditions approved, so that the three months' short-term visa could be cancelled for citizens of Turkey.

But one of the primary conditions is that for those ones asking for asylum hold biometric passports that live up to the European standards. That, of course, all relates to what I said at the beginning. Rules have to be adhered. Standards have to be adhered, and we also have to make sure that we also provide maximum possible security.

MR. EISEN: I'm going to take the first question now from Twitter, and then we'll have a question over here from this side of the room. Mikal Shok asks, could the PM please elaborate on the Czech position towards TTIP? That's the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment partnership, the free trade agreement that the EU and the United States are now attempting to negotiate.

MR. SOBOTKA: The Czech government(inaudible) is convinced based on our analysis that we've done that conclusion of the TTIP could be conducive to

increasing economic growth, both for the EU and for the U.S., and can be beneficial for the growth of our economy in the Czech Republic. We are convinced that the Czech Republic is competitive enough that it will be able to play its role as well as use the potential provided by the TTIP. It is not going to be an easy process because, obviously, there are some obstacles, certain concerns both on the European side as well as on the American side, talking about public. We should not really allow ourselves to play it down, and we should discuss it. We should put a lot of focus on it.

In fact, this morning I had a meeting with the American investors in the Czech Republic. They actually mention as one of the most important things security of the (inaudible) that flows between the U.S. and Europe and back and forth, making sure that also protection of the health of the consumer, protection of the rights of the consumer are very important for the Europeans. So all of those things should be accorded attention. However, there is a solution to them. So the Czech government tries to play an active role. We would like to see not only progress, but finally conclusion of the TTIP between the U.S. and the EU after all of the major issues have been resolved.

MR. EISEN: We have a question over here from Bob Dubek and then we'll take another one from Twitter. The questions are flowing in on Twitter @NormEisen. Keep them coming.

QUESTIONER: Mr. Prime Minister, I'm Robert Dubek, as you know, I and others, 21 years ago, founded American Friends of the Czech Republic to advocate for the Czech Republic admission to NATO, so we believe in the alliance. But right now I would like to channel Donald Trump. And the question is, we, and here in America, a lucky American gets three weeks of vacation, and maybe 11 holidays. Germans get how many? Twenty four holidays, six weeks of vacation. Yet, we bear a disproportionate burden for defending Europe.

So you mentioned strengthening the alliance. Now, is this going to include the European countries stepping up their defense budgets and playing larger roles in the defense of the Western alliance?

MR. SOBOTKA: It is quite strange, but until the year 2013 we've been experiencing in Europe some kind of optimistic period. We've been actually witnessing loosening of tensions. We were trying to start a strategic partnership with Russia. We looked for ways of cooperation through Eastern Europe partnership and various initiatives. But then we saw the events in Crimea and we realized that Europe is not sufficiently prepared for risks of similar type and similar kind. I think this was the first impulse.

Then the second impulse is the Daesh. Because the creation or emergence of such a vast terrorist organization has been something unparalleled. Of course, (inaudible) had some experience of fighting Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. But now we started facing a completely different animal. A political system, but also an organization that gained territorial kind of presence. Therefore, I believe that NATO should stay. It is a very important security infrastructure. It has its place in today's world and the defense of it.

We are also sharing common values within NATO which are related to democracy, which are related to impetus on freedom and human rights. But NATO, primarily, is a defense organization, so it should guarantee all our members a collective defense from the side of other members. I think there's no other way than increase the defense budgets in the respective member countries. The Czech Republic is probably the last note I would like to make on this matter. It is very paradoxical because many times it is believed that when there is a right wing government in place then they're increasing defense budget, and when the left wing government comes in they will start

decreasing the budget.

But I would like to tell you that the Czech Republic saw a completely different story. All the conservative, right wing countries always significantly reduced the defense budget for the past ten years. But, of course, it also related to the overall optimistic atmosphere in Europe. But we are the first government. We're a left-wing, central government, and we decided to increase the defense budget in the Czech Republic. The process will continue even in the next years, and we want to really assume a larger piece of responsibility for our own defense as well. I think it is absolutely important in order to keep some kind of balance within NATO.

I understand that there are discussions in the United States, how to share the costs on defense, which are very high. If Europe wants to be consistent within NATO it definitely has to assume a larger share. But all of those costs have to be really efficient, transparent. I would like to use transparency in this regard. This is, of course, very important, and the idea that we could dramatically increase costs within two to three years on a year on year basis, and also keep the process transparent. It is an illusion. We, of course, have to increase the budget, but we have to go step by step to make sure that the expenses or the costs are efficient, but also transparent. This is also very important.

MR. EISEN: Question to that from the Fountain View Kid on Twitter. You reference the behavior of the right wing governments in Europe over the past decade. What do you think of the gains of the far right, the national front in France, but not just in Europe, globally, and our Twitter correspondent asks if you have an opinion on Trump in the United States?

MR. SOBOTKA: Okay. These are two questions in one. So let me address both questions. A few days ago, as a matter of coincidence, I was in Paris, and I

had a chance to meet the Prime Minister Valls and President Hollande. There is a rise of nationalism in France. And it is a certain phenomenon, mainly in municipal elections, and it's related to the migration crisis, and it's also related to the social problems that are related to immigration in France. Obviously, we can't ignore this. In France we saw some kind of cooperation of democratic parties in the elections that part of majority system the socialists kind of withdrew some of their candidates and supported candidates of democratic right which is a kind of procedure, a certain kind of partnership.

I think this kind of model will be seen more and more often in Europe. We will be actually encountering more and more bigger or great coalitions or larger coalitions in Europe. In Germany, for instance, you can actually see that both big countries of left and right center have enough majority together for governing. In Slovakia, for instance, after the elections the left wing and the right wing parties joined together to eliminate extremists who actually penetrated to the Slovak Parliament, so we can actually see -- we will see more right and left wing coalitions that will be able to maintain the democratic principles. But from longer term perspective this is not good.

In trying to fight the extremists they'll be more left and right coalitions. This actually kind of denies the basic principle of a pendulum which should always go from right to left, to right to left which actually makes sure that democracy always finds some kind of middle way. And so that democracy represents the opinions and ideas of all the citizens. So, obviously, as a part of a fight against extremism it might actually be conducive to reducing the political plurality, and this might actually give rise to other populists. So, obviously, they will be promoting certain interests. And this is the problem of establishment, and also responsibility of the establishment at the time when we try to combat the rise of extremism. That's the first point.

What we in Europe are following with a great interest, the American

primaries, and the American democratic system. I think the system, in the past years, showed a lot of resistance and we suppose that it will show a lot of resistance in the future as well. But Americans are the ones to choose their own president and we will respect that, as we should respect results of democratic elections in any other European country, for instance.

MR. EISEN: Okay. We'll come back to the questions that have piled up on Twitter, but we're going to come back to the audience now. The young lady all the way in the back row, please.

QUESTIONER: Thank you for coming here and speaking Mr. Prime Minister. You spoke a lot about your value for European integration and cooperation and unification. And I was wondering if you could speak more about European expansion, specifically as it relates to the states coming out of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, and a potential independent for Catalonia?

MR. EISEN: When my wife asks me tonight about the meeting with the Prime Minister I'll say, well, we discussed Donald Trump and Catalonia.

MR. SOBOTKA: I would like to thank you reciprocally for the introducing debate and question because, for me, it is a great opportunity to formulate some of my ideas. Well, EU enlargement is a very ambitious task, and I don't think that the European Union resigned on that, especially in view of the Western Balkans. There's a great number of countries that we're negotiating with about their potential joining of the European Union.

In my introductory speech I spoke about the fact that still in the 90s we saw a lot of bloodshed in the area of the Western Balkan, and we actually experienced the first migration crisis in relation to the refugees in the Balkan countries. It is very important to realize that the Western Balkan continues being stabilized, and the

stabilization will be achieved only if and when countries such as Albania, Serbia, Sanmagora, Montenegro, Macedonia become members of the European Union. So we should not resign on this ambition to integrate the countries of Western Balkan into the European Union, ultimately.

As far as Catalonia is concerned, well, look, if it is demonstrated in reference to the Brexit referendum, we actually saw already a similar referendum on Scotland deciding yes or no to stay within the UK, and the Scottish decided to stay. I am firmly convinced that the UK will stay in the EU. I think we're doing all our best that the UK stays in there. But if they decide to leave the European Union, as there is in referendum, then we will actually see a sudden tidal wave that will give a lot of hope to nationalists and separatists. So certain regions, such as Catalonia and other regions that are thinking about their independence or some kind of form of sovereignty, obviously, fragmentation of the European Union will be, very much, playing into the hands of the separatists. So we will actually see, depending on the Brexit.

MR. EISEN: Why do you think that the Brexit will fail and the UK will stay in the EU? Why are you optimistic?

MR. SOBOTKA: Well, I spoke about what I wish for. But, of course, sometimes your wishes are not granted. You know that, right? I would wish to see the UK as a member of the European Union. I don't know whether Brits will grant me this wish, of course it's their sovereign decision. When we spoke about that and the European Council actually spoke with -- Dave Cameron actually told him, look, you couldn't have chosen a worse period for a referendum, because in all of us are dealing with problems, namely in relation to the refugee crisis. All of that, you know, might very much influence the opinion of the people.

Of course, there's going to be other subjects as well. But there are the

issues of security. The Brits, I'm sure, and I'm convinced that if they stay a part of the European Union this will really give them more security, and it will also increase the strategic opinion and role of the European Union. So, of course, there's a great number of arguments that should be, very much, strongly reminded to the British citizens. However, it is, of course, up to them to weigh cons and pros, and they will make their own decision whether they stay or they leave. I think I am speaking on behalf of the majority of the Czech citizens. We actually, most of us, wish for the UK to stay in the EU.

MR. EISEN: On the optimistic note, I want to thank the Prime Minister for joining us at Brookings, celebrating our 100th birthday together. The past 100 years since the founding of the Brookings Institution have seen a lot of ups and down in your region, and if I may say so, as a child of a Czech American, in our region of Central Europe. The leadership that your remarks have exemplified are critical to steering Europe and the Trans-Atlantic relationship through these choppy waters.

Times when that relationship have succeeded, it's been because of strong leadership on both sides of the Atlantic. Times when it's failed, over the past 100 years, because of a failure of leadership, a failure of communication, a failure to have the candid exchange that you have facilitated by being here today. Thank you very much. Thank everyone for joining us.

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## CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

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