

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issue of the search for new leaders committed to the reconciliation process and their integration in it has become more complex and more serious than it appeared to be at first. Today it is perhaps even more difficult than it ever was before. I think there is no doubt that we are in a period of an overall crisis of leadership. It is not only a global problem; it is a problem that pervades every level of society.

Perhaps the situation is even more serious and today, in many societies, rather than being about the erosion of leadership it is more about the growing demand for the rule of a strong hand. Obviously this trend would be tragic in terms of the development of entire societies and it would also certainly negatively influence any process of reconciliation between nations. The question is whether we should think not only in regard to how it is possible to contribute to the initiation of new young leaders of reconciliation, but also about how to support the more resistant parts of the society and how to involve them to deepen further the process of reconciliation even under the conditions of such negative political leadership.

I will come back to this, but I was asked by the organisers to identify the individual political and societal leaders who have encouraged or hampered reconciliation or, in other words, to seek for inspiration in the past. Characteristic of Czech-German reconciliation is that in both these reconciling societies there are people who feel that they are the victims or who, objectively, have become victims. On the one side, the victims of Nazi persecution, on the other side the victims of the post-war expulsion. Another key factor that decisively influenced the process of reconciliation between the Czechs and the Germans was the international context – first the Cold War and then the expansion of both the European and the Transatlantic structures either weakened or strengthened the role of the individual in the entire process significantly.

From this perspective the manner of leadership that Václav Havel embodied, is essentially unrepeatable. The forming of his attitudes towards Czech-German relations had already taken place during the time of dissent and was contextualised in terms of a broader reflection on the German Question and on the overcoming of the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain. He did not perceive the expulsion of Germans as a logical consequence of the Nazi occupation, but rather as one of the steps on the way to a Communist Dictatorship. Naturally he therefore considered the fall of the Iron Curtain and of the Communist regime as opening-up room for friendly gestures and especially for deeper reflection on the entire issue in the context of a moral resurgence of the society. His denouncement of the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia became one of the symbols of reconciliation between the Czechs and the Germans.

Even though his accommodating words were not to immediately meet an appropriate response and already, as President, he had, to some extent, revised his position, the on-going developments confirm one of the widely shared assumptions that can serve as an inspiration: The admission of own misconduct significantly contributes to an accommodating gesture by the other party. When, in 1995, he identified the compensation of Czech victims of Nazism as a debt to be repaid, his words carried considerable weight in Germany. Two years later the Czech-German Declaration was concluded, on the basis of which the compensation was paid.

Even though the leadership of Václav Havel was incomparable in this regard, many other personalities also contributed to Czech-German rapprochement. Cardinal Tomášek became a symbol of the religious dialogue when, at the beginning of the year 1990, he referred to the expulsion of the Germans as "a stain on the national honour". His words were indeed a turning point and were followed by an intensive dialogue between the representatives of the Churches on both sides of the border; in the post-revolutionary euphoria, however, and also within the significantly secular Czech society they were more-or-less drowned out.

The idea of reconciliation was also still held by some other representatives of dissent. Let us name, as an example to all, the future Czech Prime Minister and President of the Senate Petr Pithart, who, as the Chairman of the Bernard Bolzano Society, was significantly engaged in the dialogue with the Sudeten German Catholic Ackermann Community. Some former exiles, such as diplomat and writer Jiří Gruša and the politician Milan Horáček also played an important role. Thanks to their warm relationship with Germany, which carried with it distinct features of admiration and gratitude and also thanks to their network of contacts, they contributed significantly to the linking of the two societies and also of the political representatives at the highest level.

A specific type of leadership was then required for the negotiations concerning compensation for former forced labourers, which were led on behalf of the Czech Republic by the young diplomat Jiří Šitler. As an actual participant in these discussions, I tend, perhaps, to overestimate their importance; I think, however, that the relevant literature sometimes insufficiently reflects the fact that these were diplomatic negotiations of a kind with which we were not previously familiar. These international discussions with the participation of many parties had a significant impact in regard to the societal past and reconciliation. Their international character, the direct participation of victims at the negotiating table and the tremendous media attention greatly increased the impact of their results. The victims from Central and Eastern Europe specifically, for the first time since the war, had become direct actors in the entire process which had key importance in regard to the acceptance of the gesture made by Germany.

Let me now to do some remarks about the future of the reconciliation. For this purpose I will use the term "reconciliation" in its broader sense – as a process of overcoming the past, but also of building the future. If we look at the individual stages of the reconciliation process, Czechs and Germans have passed through the stage of the opening and developing of political and social discourse concerning past injustices and the stage of negotiation in regard to the form of the political gestures that would mitigate the previous injustice. What it is about now is making the process of Czech-German reconciliation sustainable.

For today's young generation historical injustice is not associated with questions of guilt, apology and forgiveness; today, paradoxically, the tragic chapters of a shared history and its transcendence are what in many cases connect the young people on both sides of the border and that differentiate the relationship between the two nations from their other relationships and make it for them more interesting.

The ongoing reconciliation process, focusing more and more on the younger generation, should continue to integrate the past, present and future. This requires cultivating memory culture - as an activity focused on the past, care for the living victims of past wrongdoings -

as an activity focused on the present, and also looking towards the future and focusing on deepening understanding between nations.

Concerning the past the core question that many individual and institutional protagonists of the reconciliation process have been posing to themselves for many years is: How to prepare for the cultivation of memory culture in a time without any eyewitnesses? We do not have enough space to dedicate to this topic in its entire scope. When it comes to involving the younger generation in this part of the reconciliation process, I would like to summarize that the importance of educational institutions, memorials and non-profit organisations focused on the transmission of the history will be additionally increasing. The authenticity and the emotions associated with an actual meeting with an eyewitness will still need to be transmitted, but by other means, including visits to authentic sites, searching for any historical traces in (their) own place of residence or the appropriate use of already existing interviews with eyewitnesses; all this with the appropriate use of the new technologies. It will also be necessary to find an appropriate way to involve representatives of the second generation.

When it comes to caring for the victims of Nazism, in this context, with regard to the involvement of the younger generation even in this area of reconciliation, I would like to underline the crucial importance of the cross-border involvement of young volunteers. Their activities have a strong positive impact, not only on all those directly involved, but in terms of good public relations it also conveys the concept of reconciliation to the wider society.

In the sphere of youth projects focused on the future it should be combined both the horizontal approach of promoting school and leisure exchanges and more individually designed support focused specifically towards future leaders.

Even though the concept of reconciliation is encoded as the very foundation of these activities, of course this is not the primary theme nor the main argument that, let us say, "sells" these projects. The motivation for engaging in Czech-German exchange is usually much more pragmatic and it is primarily related to personal growth and enhancing individual competency. In today's world of countless options the key question is how to meet this demand.

Despite the decline of interest in the German language in the Czech Republic, the acquisition of linguistic competence remains one of the main motivations of young Czechs for learning their neighbour. (The need to master an additional foreign language after English and not only the high-level of attractiveness of the German economy, science and culture, but also our common history are contributing to the focus on Germany in the Czech Republic.) In this regard, there is an obvious asymmetry in Czech-German relations, though mastering Czech or at least obtaining a deeper knowledge of a neighbouring country is also regarded in Germany as an attractive comparative advantage by an increasing number of people. In addition, differentiation from the mainstream is a feature that is very attractive to the young generation. In my opinion, approach targeted precisely at increasing awareness about the benefits that the mastering of the language of a neighbouring country can bring, is one of the important ways, how to attract young people.

In the out-of-school sector it is mainly about encouraging young people to fulfil their desire to try-out new things, to develop their interests and to achieve higher goals. Whether it comes from their engagement in cultural or artistic activities, in the protection of nature or in other activities of a civil society, the efforts to enrich their activities with a cross-border dimension attract thousands of young people every year to participate in Czech-German exchanges. In this case, although this is not targeted support of future leaders, it does constitute an environment from which they can develop; important are the support of civil society and the building of a dense network of contacts, mutual trust and empathy to establish a solid foundation for the relationship between the two countries.

A more individual approach focused on engaging future leaders in a mutual exchange then essentially develops from the similar motivation of the participants, but inherently it has a selective nature. The need to successfully pass the selection procedure for such a programme is also another source of motivation for participation because the completion of such a selection programme is generally recognised as proof of an individual's personal qualities. Another additional motivating factor is the increasing acquisition of social and professional contacts within the alumni network.

Let me introduce some best practice projects supported by the Czech-German Fund for the Future, which represent different areas of possible action. Since the year 2000 it has been the Czech-German Youth Forum comprising fifteen young people in the age between 16 and 26 years from each of these countries. Their rotation takes place every two years. This represents a platform by means of which participants can meet, jointly implement projects within the framework of the working groups, exchange their experiences and their views concerning current issues, formulate their individual positions and present them publicly. One former forum member, for instance, was Ondřej Liška, the current Chairman of the Czech Green Party and also the former Education Minister.

As another example I can also introduce the Czech-German Young Professionals Programme that we initiated in the year 2008 and that after a year's gap, will continue again from next year. This is an international network for young leaders from Germany and the Czech Republic. The program interlinks the fields of business, media, politics, public administration and NGO's. Each year, twelve young professionals from Germany and the Czech Republic are invited to participate in a series of workshops, and to collaborate on relevant economic, political and social issues.

There are a number of other instruments, however, for supporting the engagement of future leaders in mutual exchanges. So, very briefly, I will just offer a few good examples. Of course classic scholarships also still remain important nowadays. This does not just concern traditional college scholarships, but also one-year high-school exchanges, which are becoming more and more popular. Additionally there are also competitions of a cross-border nature. As one great example, let me mention Jugend debattiert international (supported together with the Foundation EVZ) that supports language skills, the ability to create a dialogue in addition to the communication of basic moral and democratic values. Another good means of reaching out to future leaders is a bi-national field of study at the Regensburg and Prague Universities called Czech-German Studies.

I don't want to continue, I just wanted to show, there are many ways in which to promote the involvement of young leaders in the process of reconciliation. But, of course the basic prerequisite for their success, however, is ensuring adequate funding. Though the Czech-German relations are not financially supported as much as the relations between Germany and France or Poland, there was a clear political decision to invest money to their future. Also the Czech-German Fund for the Future was define not only as an institution entrusted with providing compensation for the victims of Nazism, but also as an investment in the long-term development of mutual relations at the civil level. And this is crucial. Because I believe a strong civil society is the best possible environment from which future leaders can emerge.