

# Remarks Following Discussions With President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia

*February 20, 1990*

President Bush. Well, welcome to everybody. And it's been my great pleasure to welcome to the White House a man of tremendous moral courage, one of the heroes of the Revolution of '89, the President of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel.

Mr. President, your life has been one of miraculous transformations from the world of drama to the world of dissent, from the life of the artist to the life of the activist, and of course in the space of just 1 short year, the most miraculous journey of all, from prison to the Presidency. And of course it's possible to measure profound change in more personal terms. For years, as a dissident subject to arrest and imprisonment at any time, you could never go out without your toothbrush in your pocket. But now, as President, you can never go out without one of these neckties. [Laughter]

And many years ago you made a choice. You chose to live your life in keeping with your conscience not for others but for yourself. But others drew strength from the life you led, and your life was a tribute to the difference one man can make, powerful proof of the democratic idea. On the one side stood the state with its prisons and secret police; and on the other, Vaclav Havel, one man alone but with the strength of his convictions, always free with the freedom that comes from living in truth. First one man, and now millions.

President Havel never stopped believing in what he called this unbelievable thought: that any one of us can shake the Earth. Shake the Earth, Mr. President, and part the Iron Curtain. Shake the Earth and knock down the Berlin Wall. Shake the Earth and set in motion a process of change from Budapest to Bucharest, from Warsaw to Wenceslas Square.

And that was the Revolution of '89, and our task now in the 1990's is to move forward from revolution to renaissance, towards a new Europe in which each nation and every culture can flourish and breathe free -- a Europe whole and free.

President Havel, Czechoslovakia has turned to you to lead the way, and is it not fitting for a nation that each day writes a new page in its history to have elected a playwright as its President?

And I am pleased that we've had this opportunity to meet, to speak together about the changes that are taking place from Prague to Moscow, and about Czechoslovakia's place in the heartland of the new Europe now emerging. We know there is no room for illusions. Difficult work lies ahead. The damage of four decades of fear and repression cannot be repaired in a day. But we know something more: We know that the people of Czechoslovakia have waited long enough, and they know it's time to move forward to freedom.

Czechoslovakia and Europe are at the threshold of a new era. And I know I can speak for all Western leaders when I say that the Atlantic alliance will continue to play a vital role in assuring stability and security in Europe at this great and historic moment. And America will continue to play its part, including a strong military presence for our security and for Europe's.

Mr. President, you've not asked for American economic aid, and you made it clear that democratic Czechoslovakia wants the opportunity to do business on an equal footing. And in that regard, I am pleased to announce that I signed today letters notifying our Congress that I am waiving the Jackson-Vanik amendment for Czechoslovakia. Today our trade representatives began negotiating a trade agreement. Pending passage by your Parliament of new liberal emigration legislation, these measures will permit us to extend the most-favored-nation status to Czechoslovakia without the requirement of an annual waiver, granting your country the most liberal access to the American market possible under United States law.

Mr. President, you've also explained the enormous tasks that you face in rebuilding a democracy on the ruins of the one-party state that you inherited. And you've identified several areas where help is needed, and we are ready to respond. Let me just mention two specifics. First, in response to your request, I am asking Peace Corps Director Paul Coverdell to take the initial steps to bring the Peace Corps to Czechoslovakia by this fall. And second, I am delighted that we will soon reopen our consulate in Bratislava, as well as new cultural centers there and in Prague.

Mr. President, I assure you the United States will be part of your nation's democratic rebirth. Everything I've seen this past year tells me that Czechoslovakia can meet the challenges ahead. And as you've said in your first address as President on New Year's Day, so many times we've heard politics defined as the art of the possible; and this year has taught us something new, something more: It taught us, as you put it, that politics can be the art of the impossible.

Mr. President, before you leave us today, I would like to present you with a lithograph of your illustrious predecessor, Czechoslovakia's first President and author of your nation's Declaration of Independence, Thomas Masaryk. This portrait was done in Prague Castle and kept by President Masaryk until his death, when he gave it to his successor at Charles University's department of philosophy, President Jan Kozak.

In 1939, at the time of the Nazi invasion, Professor Kozak had 2 hours to pack his belongings and to flee Czechoslovakia. Among the items he took with him, this portrait of his friend. Professor Kozak settled in Ohio at Oberlin College, and so did this portrait until today. And now, with freedom returning to Czechoslovakia, so, too, should this portrait of President Masaryk, Czechoslovakia's first President and champion of freedom.

Once again, Mr. President, it has been my privilege to welcome you to Washington and to the White House. And God bless you, and may God bless the people of Czechoslovakia. We are pleased to have you here.

President Havel. Mr. President, I am very moved by your speech. I thank you very much for this drawing. I promise you it will be very soon back in our castle.

We had with Mr. Bush very important negotiations. We had very warm, very open, very friendly discussions. I am very glad that I had the opportunity to be here to explain what happened in Czechoslovakia, to explain our viewpoint, our policy. And thank you very much that we could be here. Thank you for the invitation. And of course I invite you to us in Prague, in Czechoslovakia. And you will see this nice drawing in my office on Prague Castle.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Godspeed.

Note: President Bush spoke at 1:35 p.m. at the South Portico of the White House. Prior to their remarks, the two Presidents met privately in the Oval Office and with U.S. and Czechoslovak officials in the Cabinet Room, and then attended a luncheon in the Old Family Dining Room.