

4<sup>th</sup> November 2013

**A Message by the Hon. Dr. George W. Vella**  
**Minister for Foreign Affairs**  
**on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial in honour of**  
**Vaclav Havel, Former President of the Czech Republic**

**Your Excellency**

**President Emeritus**

**Excellencies**

**Honorary Consul**

**Distinguished Guests**

It is a privilege for me to be with you here today to participate to the unveiling of this memorial in honour of former Czech President and statesman Vaclav Havel. Indeed it is almost two years since President's Havel's demise; however his legacy is still with us as is his vision of a united Europe based on freedom of expression and an incessant quest for peace. His personality is not associated to one particular community or country, but crosses borders and reaches mankind as a whole.

Excellencies,

Almost twenty five years ago Eastern Europe experienced a political and social cataclysmic upheaval. It was a historic shift from years of Soviet domination, to the freedom and liberties of a democratic system. Countries that used to form part of the then Soviet Union achieved their own Independence and established a State based on freedom and rule of law. In this, President Vaclav Havel was a protagonist. He championed the movement which led his country and the neighbouring countries to a dramatic change. But he was also a visionary. With his untiring social involvement and literary works he managed to establish a strong intellectual and political movement that rendered the transition of power to be a peaceful process.

One episode that strikes me in particular from the voluminous literary material that Havel left in the form of plays, speeches and critical contributions, is an address he delivered to the Czech nation on New Year of 2003. At the time the country was just coming out of the impasse of the Czecho-Slovak problem of coexistence with all that this implied to these neighbouring states. At one point in his exceptional address Havel makes this reflection:

Quote

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*"We do not have to use the words nation, or national interest in every sentence, but that we should concentrate instead on our neighbors, be they on our street or on the other side of the world. Yes, I am indeed saying that we will serve our national interests best if we simply treat each other well, treat the country we live in well, treat other nations well, and think of human history, human fate and our human mission in this world without prejudices".*

Unquote

These prophetic words apply perfectly to us today, as they applied admirably to when Havel preached to his nation and to a certain extent to the whole world.

The constellation of exceptional personalities that throughout history led their people with the power of the word, and the conviction of their actions, should serve as pointers in our daily efforts, as we continue to face challenges of all kinds. I cannot here not mention the impact that great people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and people like, Nelson Mandela, Aung San Suu Kyi and the young Malala Yousafazi left in everyone, big and small. Their contribution to the common cause of freedom through peaceful means immortalizes these visionary leaders. Their influence and impact go well beyond national and ethnic borders, to become universal and shared by everyone.

Vaclav Havel is a voice that managed to communicate a strong political message to all people of goodwill. His claim to democratic freedom and his unwavering commitment to peace made his message reach well beyond his national borders. His message found fertile ground in a world where change had long been overdue.

As for his greatest achievement I cannot say it better than by quoting what fellow Czech novelist Milan Kundera had to say about Vaclav Havel. He said "Vaclav Havel's most important work is his own life".

Thank you