

Future of the Transatlantic Bond

Opening statement by DMFA Tomáš Petříček

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Dear Ambassadors, Director, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to open this conference and to share some thoughts on its highly important topic with such distinguished colleagues on the panel and in the audience.

The issue we will be discussing today is the future of the transatlantic bond. In short: it matters immensely to this country, and to Europe as a whole. Thanks to the support of the United States the new-born Czechoslovakia emerged on the map of Europe after World War I; indeed this year we will celebrate its centennial. Then, at the end of World War II, Western Czechoslovakia was liberated by US armed forces. Moreover, thanks to the US, most of the Old Continent saw renewed prosperity that followed from the great Marshall Plan. It would also be difficult to imagine Europe free and prosperous without the security guarantees provided by the US through the Washington Treaty. And, crucially, it was the US resolve and commitment that helped bring down the Berlin Wall and the communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe 30 years ago.

When we speak about transatlantic matters, we should not forget Canada. That country, another Western bastion of democracy, has played a positive role through the past decades. However, in this event, sitting next to H.E. the US Ambassador, I will focus on the US as Europe's weightiest transatlantic partner.

The US-Europe bond has never been a mere coalition of the willing. It has been founded on convergent interests, but also on belief in *shared values*: those of freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights and market economy. The United States and the increasingly united Europe *together* helped shape the post-war international liberal order, rooted in the United Nations, other international organisations and respect for international law. Equally we have been shaping the global economy in which we, *together*, have to this day represented the major share.

But we are here to talk about the future, which is determined not only by the past but also by the present. *Still today*, we need a strong transatlantic relationship to defend the achievements of the past. We learned the hard way that whenever the US disengaged from Europe, the consequences for this country and the continent weren't good. Now Europe is facing a resurgent Russia in the East, and challenges such as migration or terrorism in the South. China is building up its economic might as well as political influence across the continent. And we are confronted with new global challenges, such as climate change and technological revolution. All of these can be tackled far more effectively if both sides of the Atlantic pull in the same direction.

However, there is no point in pretending that the situation is the same as in the past. America is *not the same* as it was ten years ago. Nor is Europe, with a degree of *integration within the European Union* like never before. With the current US administration we do not necessarily share the same views on a number of issues, from Paris climate accord to trade, the role of international bodies such as UN Human Rights Council, or the Iran nuclear deal. We as Europe should remain steadfast in maintaining our well-justified positions. But we should not allow these differences to override the deep foundations that underpin our

relationship. In these uneasy times we need to work hard to mend our temporary differences.

We realise that in Europe we have to pay our *fair share* towards the costs of transatlantic security and generally take greater responsibility. In human terms, the Czech Republic – like other partners – has repeatedly paid a high price in the *lives of our soldiers lost* during Allied operations. As regards capabilities, we have launched *concrete projects at the EU level* via the Permanent Structured Co-operation. But let us not forget: what we do is never to contradict but to *complement the NATO*. Importantly, too, our security needs to start from addressing the *root causes* of threats, including developmental needs in our neighbourhood. We need security and prosperity not only in Europe, but *also around*. Thus we are committed to steadily increasing our overall defence and security spending toward the threshold of 2% of GDP. Stronger Europe means stronger alliance, and this is clearly in the interest of both sides of the Atlantic.

Likewise, our trade links are vital: the US is our largest non-EU trading partner and investor, and our mutual exchange rose by 6% last year alone. Clearly, it is in neither Europe's nor the US interest to engage in a trade war as the result would be a *lose-lose situation* for both sides. Therefore, we welcome the agreement reached between Presidents Trump and Juncker in July. This is not to say, though, that we should give up trying to address the concerns regarding mutual asymmetries between US and EU in trade as well as deficiencies in the multilateral trade framework. We should keep discussing this in frankness.

Besides, we need to keep reminding our American friends of the value of multilateralism as such. Multilateralism, although not perfect in its current shape, still helps create a level playing field for actors in an

increasingly more connected, contested and complex world...to use the words of the EU Global Strategy. It is obvious that a “law of the jungle”, i.e. survival of the fittest, is not a principle from which smaller countries, like ours, could benefit.

I want to underline again that a vibrant, prosperous and democratic transatlantic area is in the vital interest not only of this country but the whole Europe, as well as the United States. I am sure that today’s conference will provide plenty of food for thought as to how to overcome the current tensions and how to make transatlantic relations *firmer than ever*. Let me wish you a very productive and thought-provoking debate and thank all the co-organizers for this endeavour.