

**Speech of H. R. H. the Grand Duke Henry of Luxembourg at Charles University in Prague,
during his official visit to the Czech Republic,
9th October 2002**

Luxembourg and the Czech Republic: a common destiny

Mr. Primator, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear students,

It is a great privilege for me to be able to address you in such a historical setting.

The Grand Duchess and I are delighted to be here with you today. Charles University is one of the oldest Universities of Eastern Europe, founded in 1348. Its past is closely linked to the history of the Czech Republic. In the twentieth century, this university produced great leaders such as Masaryk and Benes. It was closed by force during the nazi occupation and many students were put into concentration camps. It regained its freedom of thought only after the end of the communist regime in 1989.

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about the common destiny of our two countries, past and future, in this aptly named “patriotic” room.

But before doing so, please let me touch on the devastating floods that have so severely damaged your country in the past month. We are grieving for all the losses and damage that you have suffered over the country, and particularly in this very university. Let me say how proud I am to announce financial support for the restoration campaign launched by the Czech authorities.

My point here is to show that Luxembourg and the Czech Republic share not only a common past, but also a common destiny.

This is the third time that we have had the privilege of meeting President Havel in the context of bilateral state visits. This shows the level of friendship and esteem we have for each other.

Tomorrow I shall be inaugurating our new Embassy in Prague. It is the latest official presence of Luxembourg in your country, which began in the time of Henry VII, Count of Luxembourg and Holy Roman Emperor. It was Henry who accepted the proposal of the representatives of the Kingdom of Bohemia to marry your young Princess Elisabeth, daughter of Wenceslas II, of the Premyslid dynasty, to his son John of Luxembourg.

In a few days' time, I shall be delighted in return to witness the opening of a Czech resident embassy in Luxembourg.

The city of Prague, and the walls of this university, named after John's son Charles, remind us of Luxembourg's past dynasty. John's life in Prague was not always a happy one. He became less and less interested in domestic politics. He fought in battles from Lithuania to Northern Italy, and will go down in history with his heroic death at the battle of Crécy in 1346. His son Charles IV, Emperor and Count of Luxembourg, retained no strong ties with Luxembourg. Having promoted the county to a duchy, he gradually left the country to his half-brother Wenceslas. Charles was a great emperor but above all a great king of Bohemia.

Charles' education and life reflect the European dimension of his day. He was born Wenceslas, in Czech Vaclav, and at the age of seven was sent by his father to the French Court. That is where he took the name of Charles, a tribute to the French king. When he returned to Bohemia ten years later he spoke French, Italian, German and Latin, and learnt Czech again.

His vision was to make his capital the cultural centre of Bohemia, enriched by the cultures of both France and Central Europe. So he rebuilt it, with a new quarter, Charles Bridge, the castle and the university. At the time, this university was the only one of its kind east of the Rhine. Thanks to this, Czech culture became closer to other European cultures.

The creation of this university was of inestimable value in a local and European setting, and at both a political and a cultural level. In the founding charter, Charles explains that he was acting more as a king of Bohemia than as a Holy Roman Emperor, as Bohemia stood particularly close to his heart.

The successors of the House of Luxembourg, Wenceslas and Sigismund, and also Jodocus in Moravia, were well-read and open-minded. Through them, the links between Bohemia,

Moravia and Luxembourg were guaranteed. When Jodocus died, the Duchy of Luxembourg went to the wife of the Duke Antony of Brabant and Limburg. This put an end to the direct links between the Duchy of Luxembourg and the kingdom of Bohemia.

How can we relate this heritage to modern Europe and to the current project of building a Union for all Europeans?

Today, the project of a Europe where all nations and cultures are united in peace and prosperity is at last within our reach. With Charles IV, Bohemia had won a place in Europe. Since then, Prague has never ceased to flourish intellectually in both neighbouring and distant countries. Your philosophers, intellectuals, artists, writers and musicians have brought cultural and intellectual riches not only to their country but also to the rest of Europe and the world.

I would like to show that you are well known to us. Do I need to say that you have been in Europe forever, that you belong there as much as those who were able to start building the European Union nearly fifty years ago? What you, and through you, Central Europe, have contributed to the continent, puts you at the heart of our common destiny and the building of a prospective great European Union. The Czech people gave a magnificent lesson to all Europeans in November 1989. As soon as you recovered your full independence, you decided to share in the common destiny of the member states of the European Union.

There are similarities today in the respective experiences of our countries. Indeed, both became independent relatively recently: Luxembourg in the first half of the nineteenth century, Czechoslovakia early in the twentieth. Both are surrounded by powerful neighbours. We have endured hardships before mastering our own destiny.

Entering the European Union is a great opportunity for small countries. And this is where I insist on a common destiny for our two countries. Without the EU, Luxembourg would not have had so much to say in high-level decision-making in Europe. It would not have become the seat of some of the European Union's institutions. Small countries have things to contribute to the European Union, and if they do so, they are listened to. The EU gives small countries not only peace and prosperity, but political strength as well.

I understand the doubts of your people concerning what they might lose when joining. I am talking about loss of sovereignty. It is only understandable that the Czechs are concerned that

they might lose their decision-making capacities to Brussels. Your people has been deprived of its free will for too long, and you certainly do not want to give it away now.

But it is a misconception. Most citizens believe that Brussels takes decisions for member states. It is not true. Decisions are taken together, and member states participate democratically. Most laws that are passed in member states are in fact community laws, so that the European Union has become a reality in our everyday life. It is in fact sovereignty sharing.

Secondly, Europe is about solidarity. It is on the basis of that fundamental principle that your country gets its financial help to restructure its economy and modernise its infrastructures and, today, to face the damage caused by the recent floods.

Belonging to the EU opens a new field of activity in external relations for member states. This is particularly true thanks to the rotating presidency which has up to now allowed each member state, whatever its size and political weight, to chair the decision-making machinery of the Council of Ministers.

Just as you have done since 1989, Luxembourg has chosen to join all European and all international organisations created since 1945.

This has been the first time in its national history that the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg has been able to develop in harmony with its neighbours and be assured of sound economic progress, protected by membership of international organisations. Thanks to the EU, old conflicts and rivalries have been driven away. The European Union's aim, at its foundation, was to bring peace and to make Europe self-sufficient in food and goods. We have reached those goals, and the time has come to find new goals for the European project. With your contributions you can and will help us.

In this regard, I am very satisfied by the fact that your country is, along with other candidate countries, associated to the work of the Convention, whose role is to prepare the Europe of tomorrow. Indeed, crucial topics are being discussed such as the drafting of a constitution, the definition of fundamental rights, as well as the delimitation of powers and competencies.

Let me also insist that the European Union goes far beyond cooperation, which is no more than a temporary association to achieve a limited goal. The European Union means integration, where going back is no longer an option. Economic and Monetary Union is a perfect illustration of that. But I have to stress the fact that the Union of European peoples can only prosper through

the vitality of their national roots and of their own cultural identities. They are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they complete and enrich one another.

All I have just evoked about Europe enables me to say that the great enlargement that is about to take place will bring advantages both for member states and for candidate countries. In this context, it is worth recalling the words of J. F. Kennedy: “Do not ask what your country can do for you, but ask yourself what you can do for your country”. What future members can do for the European Union is at least as important as what the EU can do for them.

I would not want to present things in a better way than they really are, and in any case I could not do so. The EU is about solidarity, and about compromise. It is true that impending enlargement raises difficult questions in our minds. Is it going to cause instability and inequality? Will it drastically change migration flows, labour markets and salaries? How will candidate countries catch up, economically but also politically, with the present member states? What will happen to the large proportion of farmers? All these are legitimate questions. What we can do is to be confident and learn from the previous enlargements. In the Eighties, three Mediterranean countries had to catch up, but they eventually did very well. In our experience, there are more advantages to belonging to the European Union than to staying outside.

Without underestimating the numerous challenges I have just mentioned, do I need to say that membership of the European Union is more than statistics, figures and procedures?

Your country has recently joined all European organisations. In order to play an effective role in all these fora, you have, with your neighbours the Visegrad group, done a lot to create a consultative platform inspired by the experience of the Benelux countries. You may know that we are pleased that your new government has made it very clear that the impending accession to the EU is its top priority.

The Czechs and the Luxembourgers have much in common. But we have lost track of one another for many long years, and now we are heading together towards a new challenge, namely building the enlarged Union together.

We are very satisfied that your country has already found a privileged place on the international scene. The fact that you are hosting the NATO summit in Prague in six weeks' time proves this point.

Since I have mentioned it, let me say a few words on Europe and the North Atlantic Alliance. Europe is going to be at the top of the agenda in the future, whether we want it or not. This is true for NATO, too. The Europe we know - I have said this before, but please let me say it once again - would never have had the dynamism it has without the existence of NATO. But it is also true that NATO has no future unless it manages to rest on two pillars, one on the other side of the Atlantic with the USA and Canada, the other in Europe. We need a strong and thus a credible European pillar in the Alliance. We should put all our efforts into establishing working links between our two organisations.

As to NATO, the situation is similar to the European one. I believe NATO certainly has a future, on condition that it respects a double imperative, in just the same way as Europe does: on the one hand, respect of the same rule of law for all, and on the other, the effective participation of all.

Do not get me wrong. We take risks with enlargement. We take the risk of possible dilution. But we do not have a choice: we must heal this historical fracture. We must once and for all wipe out the sombre diktat that drove us away from countries we are now rediscovering.

It is in this spirit that I would like to conclude.

There exists another Europe, made up of nations that we know very little of. It has been years since we have met any of them. Let us learn to listen to these peoples and nations of Central and Eastern Europe. Let us remind ourselves in this context of the words Milan Kundera pronounced shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall: "It often appears to me", he said, "that the known European culture hides another unknown culture, that of small nations. People suppose small nations necessarily copy large nations. It is an illusion. They are often very different. The Europe of small states is another Europe. It has another vision. It has another way of thinking, contrasting with the way large nations think".

And let me tell you that my sole intention today is to make sure that this difference is being heard. We are lucky and proud to work together with you for the United Europe of tomorrow.

Thank you.

