Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

erlauben Sie mir am Anfang meiner Rede an der berühmten Humboldt Universität etwas persönlich zu sein. Diese Universität, die Möglichkeit hier mit Ihnen meine Ideen über Europa, Mitteleuropa, Deutschland, Tschechien zu teilen bedeutet für mich sehr viel. Sogar so viel dass ich der Versuchung nicht widerstehen kann zumindest ein paar Sätze hier auch auf Deutsch zu sagen. Die deutsche Sprache war für lange Zeit ein großartiger Verbündeter für mich mit dessen Hilfe ich mir die Welt in den Zeiten des Kalten Krieges zumindest intellektuell erschlossen habe. Auf diese Art und Weise möchte ich der deutschen Sprache meinen Dank erweisen.

I had not visited any foreign country before the age of 33. I hadn't even tried. I was like my father that way: he was a doctor, he loved foreign languages, world literature - and yet he never travelled.

I once asked him if he regrets never seeing foreign lands. He replied - "No. I wouldn't know what to say if people started to talk about Czechoslovakia. What we have here is unbearable. But still, I can't travel abroad and smear my country."

So it happened that - long before I set foot in your country - I got to know Germany through its literature and philosophy.

It was only after the fall of the Berlin Wall that I visited the scene of Goethe's Walpurgisnacht in Brocken in Harz; that I saw the Loreley I knew from Heine and Brentano; or the house of the Buddenbrooks in Lübeck.

The fall of the Berlin wall was not just a geopolitical turning-point. It was a moment that changed my life. The **Warsaw Pact may have lost the Cold War, but I felt as a victor.**

The freedom that reeled through the ruins of the Wall promised genuine emancipation: personal, political, and intellectual. Not just economic or political liberalization - but freedom to create something new, to aspire for a more authentic democracy - to build a new 'polis'. In international relations, the end of the Cold War promised a global order based on dialogue and multilateral cooperation.

But, as Kant reminds us, what matters in revolutions is what spectators

make of them. The French revolution and the ideals of the Enlightenment inspired all Europeans to seek change in their own lives and their own societies. The storming of the Bastille was seen an opportunity for all mankind. This - according to Kant - is what distinguishes historical breakthroughs from mere episodes.

I had often wondered whether the events of 1989 had a similar effect in the West. Had they also inspired a yearning for change? Were they also seen as an opportunity to consider the problems of Western democracies, or the tendencies toward financial oligarchy and social inequality of neo-liberal capitalism? **In retrospect, I think not.**

Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the 'end of history' - and most of us accepted it but draw the wrong lesson from it. Fukuyama and Hegel were right but our mistake was that we mistook this end of history for a final victory of liberal democracy in the history of political systems. One of the consequences of our hubris was that we started taking everything for granted instead of taking care of so important things like mutual respect – mutual recognition, maintenance of trust, legitimity of power and communicative action. To cut it short – our mistake was that we read too much of Fukuyama and forgot to combine him with Jürgen Habermas since it is Habermas who urges us to learn that not just revolutions but everyday work is maintaining the world of liberal democracy and that we are responsible for consequences of our activities or lack of our activities. This imperative of Habermas is fully in line with the philosophy of our Czechoslovak president Masaryk who used to say that we should strive for a small revolution every day, so that we avoid a big one - which is always a tragedy, because it is a sign of time wasted.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We probably have **wasted some time - and missed a lot of opportunities -** in the post-Cold war era: both in building Europe and in constructing a peaceful global order.

Which is **also why we now find ourselves - as the European Union - in a state of uncertainty**.

Our challenges are well-known: from the refugee and immigration crisis through Brexit to the rise of Euro-sceptic populist parties and the decline of Europe's global weight.

What all of them have in common **is the erosion of trust.** Anthony Giddens explains trust as the achievement of modernity: the fact that we casually board a plane without knowing anything about aviation physics or airplane construction.

Europe now suffers from a profound crisis of trust - as a result of social inequality, the decoupling of capital and labour, the detachment of global finance from the economy, and other disruptive effects of globalization.

But the decline in trust is also of EU's own making, because **it ceased to act as a force for political emancipation and social progress.**

The EU is stuck in a technocratic mode - it lacks the connecting tissues that sustain trust. It has a common currency without a common fiscal and social policy; it has a borderless zone without a common asylum regime or integrated border protection; it has a set of institutions without democratic accountability and adequate public participation; it created a political space without a political identity. In the period of fragmentation and crises EU turned out to be too weak to deliver. The rise of nationalist and tribal politics **is a direct consequence and expression of this failure**.

It is true that the EU was designed as an elite project. I am speaking about the very beginning of this project as Adenauer and de Gaulle shook hands over heads of their still antagonized nations. Maybe, at the beginning their unifying vision was really a conspiracy of elites. But it sure cannot survive as such.

The cycle of EU crises will not be broken unless we close the gaps in public trust and democratic accountability.

The other **common element of our crises is that neither can be solved without Germany.**

GERMAN ROLE IN EUROPE

In 2011, Radek Sikorski declared here in Berlin - as Polish foreign minister - that he fears German power less than he fears German inactivity.

In 2011, Germany was not yet comfortable in the shoes of European leadership. For six decades, Europeans had wished for German restraint.

In this respect, the Eurozone crisis was a transformative event: it reconfigured the perceptions of German power. Expectations, Europeans had of Germany, rose to unprecedented levels. It caught everyone - including yourselves - by surprise.

Five years later, you should no longer be surprised by high expectations. In the past five years, you have demonstrated - to your partners and to yourselves - that you have the self-confidence, resources and ingenuity to lead Europe.

The EU has benefited from German action and leadership: during the Eurozone crisis, during the conflict in Ukraine, and in other situations. **Therefore, I see no reason to fear either German power or German inactivity.**

What I fear is the sheer weight of German responsibility for the future of the European project. It is one thing to be a reluctant leader. It is quite another to be a solitary one, which is what Germany is now - even if rather by coincidence.

German solitary leadership is an unstable and unhealthy condition for Europe - and would become even more so should Britain leave the EU. **This is the paradox: German strength is a measure of Europe's weakness. We will be more comfortable if we would have both the same time: German strength and European strength.**

It raises difficult questions. One of them, of course, is the 'German question': the centuries-old dilemma of geography, identity and power. Should we be worried about return of 'German Europe', the one which Helmut Schmidt warned against? I remember his speech at the SPD congress few years again where Helmut Schmidt warned against the temptation of the return to the German hegemony.

Could German political dominance trigger a backlash from Eurozone debtor countries and other disaffected Member States?

To my mind, this is a wrong perspective - and a wrong question. The

German question of today is **not the excessive concentration of German power - rather, it is the excessive concentration of German responsibility**. It is a not a German question, but a European problem. And it also reflects the weakness of Germany's partners, and of the EU as a whole.

In this context, allow me to offer several pieces of advice at the risk that giving advice is rather pleasure for the advisor than the receiver.

First, take extra care and patience to **consult your neighbours and partners**, especially on decisions of strategic consequence that also affect their interests.

It sometimes happens that we learn of your choices only after they are made public. One example was your government's decision last year to sidestep the Dublin regulation and open Germany's borders for unregistered refugees arriving via the Balkan route.

Let me make myself clear: I respect Germany's compassionate response to the humanitarian emergency. I know the choice had to be quick. I can even understand its strategic logic, given the pressure on the Western Balkan countries. **Nonetheless - you should have consulted us**.

I raise this because it was not an isolated case. In your strategic decisions on energy policy and energy security, we would have welcomed more communication.

This is unfortunate because Europeans have strong faith in German leadership: 66 percent of Europeans in 8 selected countries, according to a recent poll. But the figure would be even higher if your decisions were explained better.

My **second** advice would be for Germany to **strengthen the independence of Community institutions**. They ensure that EU policies are inclusive, coherent - and blind to asymmetries of power among Member States.

Which is why the impression of undue German influence - especially over the legislative proposals of the Commission - would be so troubling, particularly for smaller Member States. European leadership implies responsibility for the very principles of cohesion and equality that

Community institutions are designed to protect.

We must be honest: all Member States are complicit in the re-nationalization of European governance. But we should also admit that the drift toward inter-governmental decisions started in the Eurozone crisis: with the intent to stabilize the Eurozone and encourage macro-economic convergence, but with the understanding that political and fiscal integration would follow.

Somewhere along the way, German leadership abandoned the pursuit of a political integration. If sooner or later, Europe's overlapping crises will demand closer integration then we would not be able to avoid speaking also about the political integration.

The operative word here is 'inclusive'. The process of the European integration has to be inclusive, flexible and open-ended. Only this will make it attractive to the people.

My **third** advice is self-evident: **exercise leadership by building consensus**. This is what German diplomacy was always admired for: its capacity for reconciling differences, for harnessing coalitions, for investing in durable partnerships.

Leadership in Europe is more than action and rule-setting: it is about cultivating trust. The more responsibility is placed on your shoulders, the more dependent you become on trusting partnerships. **Stronger partners and stronger partnerships** are the only **solution to the paradox of German strength** and European weakness**.**

This brings me to the most difficult - but also the most important - part of my presentation: the state of relations between Germany and Central Europe, and between Eastern and Western parts of our Union.

CENTRAL EUROPE AND THE RISKS OF EAST-WEST DIVIDE

There are moments - in political as well as in personal relationships, like in a marriage - when a single dispute triggers an irreversible dynamic of alienation. It feeds into partners' prejudices and frustrations. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Partners start convincing themselves that they do not really need each other - despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It is a classic story of unintended break-ups.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is the critical moment in the dialogue between Western Europe and Central Europe. We must act now to stop the spiral of estrangement. A new divide would undo the efforts of an entire generation - of Czechs and Poles but also Germans and other Europeans. Even more importantly: it would deprive us of the strategic opportunities of future cooperation.

For the Czech foreign policy - for me personally - there is no greater task, and no greater challenge. That is why I **must address the difficult issues head-on**.

Let me comment first on the substantive dispute: permanent quotas for refugee relocation and resettlement.

From a policy standpoint, the Commission's proposals - as they stand today - are **ill-designed. The reason for calling them ill-designed is not based on our reluctance to be solidary. It´s based on the fear that with a help of automatic relocation mechanism the EU may create a monster of a precedent which will permanently enforce a standard response to any future migration crisis with unforeseeable consequences for the security and economies of all Member States.** Yet the flaws aren´t confined just to the permanent relocation mechanism. The proposed sum of 250 000 per refugee-not-accepted is a measure of just how out of the context the policy has become: remember that average wages in the Czech Republic stand at less than 1000 euro.

Which doesn't mean that the Czech Republic rejects the principle - that the EU needs a fairer system of burden-sharing when it comes to immigration. We are aware of our responsibility. We stand ready to accommodate Syrian and refugees who need our protection, provided that the process is voluntary, and provided that we design a mechanism that actually works.

But the dispute is not just a matter of good or bad policy. It is also a matter of domestic politics in all EU Member States.

In the Czech Republic, implementation of mandatory quotas - against the public's explicit opposition - would **inflict irreparable damage to the**

cause of European integration. The debate on the British future in the EU shows how debates on immigration can brutalize the climate in one democratic country. This debate threw the British conservative party nearly in a state of civil war. It´s unbelievable when one of the arguing MPs may say: I don´t want to stab the PM into his back, I wish to stag him in front so I can see the expression of his face.

My government has staked its political fortune on convincing our citizens to trust Europe. On that basis, we have brought the Czech Republic back into the core of European integration after a decade of isolation under right-wing cabinets. **Implementation of the Commission's current proposals on permanent quotas would undercut all of our efforts. I don't want it.**

It is a mirror image of your own domestic concerns here in Germany - that if other EU partners are not seen as contributing, if Germany is seen as bearing the brunt of the migration crisis, it will strengthen your own anti-European and anti-immigrant movements.

Such a **conflict of national imperatives** is not uncommon in the EU - in fact, it is the **very essence of EU politics**, a by-product of our interdependence. It must be solved through compromise acceptable for all Member States.

This is the European way: a compromise that leaves everyone at the table equally happy - or equally unhappy. It is what makes the EU such a unique project.

So why are we still unable to break the stalemate over quotas?

It is because the issue is **no longer about policy - or even about domestic politics**. Quotas have turned into a **subject of morality**: of sweeping ethical claims and moral absolutes. It´s an insolvable situation: on one hand there are people deeply convinced that the priority for any state is the sovereignty to decide who can cross the border and on the other hand there are people convinced that unconditioned solidarity must be put first.

How shall I respond?

I would respond that practicality is an integral part of any ethical dilemma; that compassion and solidarity are only as good as our capacity to deliver

solutions that work; that the morality of our action must also be judged by the sustainability of our policies.

I would also respond by rejecting the premise that there is only one way of enacting European solidarity; that the respect for dissenting views and public opinion should be at the core of Europe's liberal order.

This is why the issue of quotas spiralled into a much wider conflict: it feeds into our prejudices and **constructed narratives of 'the Other'** - it reinforces your image of a backward and xenophobic East, and our image of an imperial and patronizing West.

The debate has exposed just much we still misunderstand each other. But perhaps there is a silver lining: at least we are now aware of where the gaps lie. We now know that we must work harder to bridge them. We now know that we **must have this conversation and overcome cheap stereotypes.**

In my view, the roots of our present misunderstanding lie elsewhere: they stem from different experience - and perceptions - of the global transformations that took place since 1989. The central fact here is that **Central Europe's 'return to the West' coincided with the dawn of a post-Western world**. The effects of this contradiction haunt us today.

To explain my argument, let me first return to 1989. As I said, the revolutions probably looked very different from the other side of the crumbling wall. For many of us in former Czechoslovakia, it was a moment of opportunity for change and self-improvement. The conclusion drawn by Western democracies was exactly the opposite: 1989 served to confirm that there is no reason for change or self-improvement. This was only logical: **there is no stronger legitimization than victory.**

This is how the concept of transition was born - as a framework for post-communist states to mature into the perfection of Western reality. Don't get me wrong: we will always be grateful for the assistance provided by Germany and other Western partners in the 1990s.

However, looking back, it is hard not to see the **distorting effects of a paradigm in which political creativity was reduced to the technocratic**

exercise of catching up and emulation of the West.

At the very moment of our freedom and emancipation, we discovered that all social dilemmas were effectively settled, and all that was left for us was to put these solutions into practice.

Our job was simply to board the flight to the future of Western liberal democracies - in full trust that the aircraft was flawlessly constructed and that our destination was right.

Many of our political leaders bought into the thesis that history has ended - and were intent on rushing to the end. In the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus proclaimed that post-communist economies must become even more capitalist than the original.

Even during the accession process, the EU's technocratic mode of change didn't leave much room for discussing alternative policies. This is why for post-communist states, 2004 marked the end of transition: the point of destination – Paradise on Earth. Let's not forget that Europe was in a fairly good condition in 2004.

The ruptures of the past years have disillusioned many Europeans, and none more than the Greeks. But for Central Europeans, the psychological implications of a post-Western world are even more profound. This is because **today's uncertainty invalidates the fundamental assumption of post-communist politics: that progress is linear and inevitable.**

We have discovered that, instead of the end of history, **we have reached the 'end of the future'.** For the first time since 1989, 'change' ceased to mean 'change for the better'. For the first time since 1989, it looks plausible that our children will be worse off - that our future in the EU might entail less democracy, less prosperity, and less security. I am reminded of the passage from the diaries of Franz Kafka: "Did you really think that you would always be better and better?"

The pessimism today is not just an East-European phenomenon. All EU member states are grappling with anxieties of decline. But for many old Member States, the prospect of long-term stagnation is not completely new: they have experienced economic problems and terrorism of the

1970's, some have experienced the geopolitical decline of de-colonization.

For post-communist democracies, politics without hope belonged to the communist times. Now we have to learn that democracies aren´t protected from general crises and even physical insecurity. The TV screens showing incredible atrocities taking place in European capitals speak volume.

All this came to the fore in the quota debate. Visegrad countries are accused that they failed in their transition homework - that we have not done enough to internalize Western liberal values.

But your criticism would be much more credible had our citizens not experienced their own disillusionment with the reality of Western societies. We have seen the weakness and failures of old Member States in the face of economic and financial crises as well as security and governance challenges - to say nothing of integrating immigrant communities. Places like Molenbeek or St. Denis became sort of warning codes all around the EU.

Watching the rise of the far-right across Europe, we have realized that democracy in old Member States is just as polarized and vulnerable as ours.

In this context, i**t cannot come as a surprise that our citizens' faith in the judgement of Brussels institutions and Western governments is not as strong as it once was**. Our governments are sceptical **to trust EU institutions with another technocratic solution that ignores the concerns of the public, and lacks adequate appreciation of context and consequences.**

Managing immigration may be the defining challenge of our time. Once again, our partners are asking us to board a flight. And we will - we are aware of our responsibility. But this time around we **must be consulted on the flight plan and the destination**.

Ladies and gentlemen

The point of my argument is not meant to assign blame - but to underline that we must all work harder to overcome our frustrations and misunderstandings.

Let me therefore suggest several principles for moving forward in our political dialogue.

First, we must **re-focus our efforts back onto substance**. We shall put forward common pragmatic actions instead of getting stuck in theoretical and moral disputes.

Second, we must **come to terms with the fact that we disagree on certain issues** - and that it is a sign of healthy debate rather than moral failings or political sabotage.

At the same time - and that is my third point - we should all **exercise a basic sense of perspective**, and not exaggerate our differences.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We must widen our horizons and see beyond our current disputes. A forward-looking perspective will reveal enormous and untapped potential of our cooperation: not just in trade, security or energy, but in truly strategic terms: to work together to reinvigorate the European project and realize the promise of the freedom associated with 1989.

If we look beyond the disputes of the day, we may find that Visegrad countries - and the Czech Republic in particular - are **Germany's natural strategic partners** in Europe: these are economies with scope for future growth; countries that share many structural interests with Germany; and societies that, despite a troubled history, have a special affinity for Germany and Germans.

If we unlock its full potential, strategic cooperation between Germany and Visegrad could yet **become a driver of EU's political and economic renewal**, not unlike the Franco-German tandem that powered European integration for much of post-war history.

In this regard, the Czech Republic feels a special sense of responsibility - for ensuring that we do not allow our present misunderstandings to foreclose our common future.

So what does the Czech Republic bring to the table?

First - the **stability of our democratic institutions**. My government may

occasionally have some tensions but we can work them out. In today's volatile climate, that is no small asset. At a time when liberal democracy is challenged in many EU member states, Czech democratic institutions remain resilient.

The Czech government also brings to **the table its strong commitment to the fundamental idea of pooling responsibility as the basic principle of the whole project of European integration which makes it different from the balance of powers the Europe based upon in the past.** Though we're not part of the Eurozone, we support further pooling of sovereignty in key areas, from security policy to energy or the single market. To keep the idea of European integration process vivid we must learn where we can get for our common actions real support from our publics. Therefore we cannot continue after the vote in the UK like business as usual. Polls show that closer cooperation in defence and security can appeal to our citizens. Perhaps, we shall make our efforts especially in this area. Referring to the recent positions on the future of the integration process voiced by the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, this accent which is put on smart integration is something we also have in common with Germany.

These commonalities are the foundation of our bilateral Strategic Dialogue, launched last year. The adjective of 'strategic' is particularly pertinent here: it refers to the fact that our agenda transcends bilateral or even regional issues - it speaks to our ambition to jointly shape Europe's future.

This is also how I envisage the role of the Czech Republic in the context of Visegrad cooperation: as working tirelessly to rebuild trust and bring Germany and Visegrad closer together.

I strongly reject any tendencies to position Visegrad as a counter-balance to Germany or the core of EU integration. From the Czech perspective, Visegrad cooperation is only meaningful in the European framework and in strong partnership with Germany.

To paraphrase your Chancellor: if the Visegrad group is ever aimed against Germany or the European project - that would no longer be my Visegrad.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by returning to the title of my presentation - the paradox of German strength and European weakness. As I have said, Germany needs stronger partners and stronger partnerships to overcome it. Europe deserves a strong European Union! We, your Czech neighbours, are ready to explore with you how to make the EU so strong and attractive again. In such a way that people like my father, who unfortunately didn´t experience the return of the freedom to my country, would be proud of our contribution to the future of Europe.

My father was a firm and solid man but I know that he experienced moments in the history when all solid melted into air. Will 2016 be one of these moments? It must not happen! Our fate is in our hands.

Thank you.