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## **Before the visit of President Bush to Prague**

As is well known, President of the United States George Bush will pay a short working visit to the Czech Republic today and tomorrow. He was here once already – during the Prague NATO Summit in 2002. Although our contacts with the USA have been very intensive in the last years and our relations are surely very good, this visit undoubtedly is an extraordinary event.

One of the topics of discussion that I will have with him together with Prime Minister Topolanek and representatives of the Czech government will be the deployment of a radar base on the Czech territory which is to become a part of the planned system of the American missile defense. I am more than aware that it is an extraordinarily sensitive and complicated issue which divides the Czech political scene as well as the public. Therefore, I consider it necessary to say a few words beforehand.

Although it might look like that according to the current media reports, the radar base and related negotiations are not a matter of the last couple of months. The first steps were made and negotiations were conducted by governments led by the CSSD several years ago. I did not participate in them and was not – even as the president of the country – informed about them. Therefore, I officially asked the then Prime Minister Paroubek for details and position of the government when the information was released to the public. I was informed that the negotiations had been of probing nature. But I have to say publicly that the position of the Social Democratic government on the possible deployment of some elements of the missile defense, especially radar, in our territory was definitely not negative during the time of its governing.

The current government took this agenda over and approved the opening of the specific negotiations.

**My own position stems from my permanent conviction that the American presence in Europe, including the military presence, has been of key importance for stability, defensiveness and prosperity of countries of our continent. Western Europe owes its successful sixty years of development to it.**

Keeping this transatlantic bond is immensely important for the future as well. **It is also in our interest that the European and our security be guaranteed by the USA and that the USA further remain one of the elementary invariables of the**

## **European Union's policies, direction of which is just being decided.**

**Therefore, my answer to the question whether to agree with the negotiations on radar deployment is yes. Yes, because of our own Czech interests, not because of foreign interests.** At the same time, I always add that it is a complex issue which has many complicated connections and links. It is not a trivial Yes-No as in a simple media poll. When I say yes I mean a qualified yes, structured yes, and not – as I said many times – a hooray yes.

Sensitivity of this theme as perceived by our public has a factual as well as symbolic level. Both are equally important.

The first is factual and strategic in its nature. Here, I fully rely on the qualified position of the Czech government, military experts and diplomats who are responsible for the negotiations of the optimal conditions for the agreement between our two countries. **I rely on their assurance that the deployment of the radar here (and interceptors on the territory of neighboring Poland) is an important part of the strategic defense of the Euro-Atlantic civilization space and that it is not aimed at Russia. I tried hard to explain this very thing to Russian President Putin.**

The symbolic level is more difficult and sensitive from the point of view of the Czech public. I understand feelings of many fellow citizens – feelings given by our not always pleasant historical experiences – who perceive the presence of even one very small unit of another state on our territory as a violation of our state sovereignty. I also feel it that way. The government has to guarantee that the negotiated conditions of this defense installation will not affect our state sovereignty. But it is necessary to remind the Czech public about the fact that joining NATO and especially the EU was even more substantial encroachment of our sovereignty. And we endorsed the latter without any problem in a referendum. However, I consider the symbolic dimension of the issue as extremely serious and I do not want to belittle some of the arguments heard.

**However, the history has shown us that not the most well-intentioned pacific wishes and illusions but a firm security alliance and the ensuing ability to face changing threats and security risks bring security and prosperity to the country.**

We cannot face the new threats and risks menacing the free world on our own. And we cannot face them without adequate defense means. In this respect, the world has not changed after the fall of communism. The Czech public should realize also this fact. And I can promise that exactly in this spirit I will talk to the American president on Tuesday.

Václav Klaus, Lidové Noviny, 4. 6. 2007