

SPEECH OF CZECH PRIME MINISTER**Mirek Topolánek**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to the country that was actually at the birth of the atomic era. It was the Jachymov uranium ore, from which Maria Curie-Sklodowska isolated the first gram of radium. I would like to welcome you to the country that was the ninth country in the world to start operating the research nuclear reactor. Welcome to the country the industry of which produced a complete equipment for 24 nuclear blocks and country that has been safely operating its nuclear power stations for more than twenty years. Welcome to the country that has something to say on the future of nuclear energy.

The Prague Nuclear Forum 2008 enjoys great attention. I am pleased I can welcome here the President of the European Commission, Mr. José Manuel Barroso, the Commissioner for Energy, Mr. Andris Piebalgs, father of the Nuclear Forum, Mr. Dominique Ristori, the Prime Ministers of 6 countries of the EU, one Deputy Prime Minister, many Ministers and nearly two hundreds industry leaders, experts and politicians from all of the EU countries, the Russian Federation and other countries.

I am delighted that the EU managed to assert the organisation of these nuclear forums, where one is free to discuss nuclear energy issues. I am pleased that we have been entrusted with their organisation together with the Slovak Republic. With the country that is close to us, if not the closest and that has similar opinion to ours. And that already has to – in contrast to us – deal with the issue of self-sufficiency in energy production now.

As I was thinking about the best introduction of today's meeting, I came across a thirty year old text by Russian academic Andrei Sakharov. In June 1978 a prestigious American magazine The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists published his article: "Nuclear Energy and Freedom of the West". He expressed a prophetic thought there: It will be neither oil, nor gas, nor coal, nor renewable sources, but nuclear energy that will provide a reliable and sufficient source of affordable energy for the West. It will secure its freedom and independence.

These words are still valid. Despite this they have not been heard by Western politicians and the public for the whole thirty years (though Sakharov's article has been subsequently reprinted in the majority of renowned papers). The opposite came true. Ideologically motivated attacks from the part of environmental movements against nuclear power stations

have found allies in many political parties and even have caused that some governments to a great extent reduced the use nuclear energy.

An eloquent example of purposeful terrifying bringing about aversion to nuclear energy is represented by the pseudo-problem of nuclear waste treatment. This issue is technically resolved. What is missing is merely the political and economic courage to choose the way of use of substantial amount of energy contained in the so called waste. Andrei Sakharov also wrote about this issue thirty years ago.

What are the consequences of the decision not to develop nuclear energy? The decision made as I believe not on the basis of substantial arguments, but irrational campaign with the aim to cause fear? As a consequence of this step not only sources of electric energy are missing in Europe at present, but also nuclear technologies experts. Who would be interested in a subject with no future? Will we have the courage to recommend the member states to raise investments into education and training of nuclear experts and into research of new generation nuclear reactors at this forum?

By reason of the decision not to support nuclear energy the "Freedom of the West" Sakharov wrote about, is endangered today. Due to this decision we miss this reliable source of cheap energy. Our dependency on oil and gas grows, we have to import them, often from unstable regions, for gradually increasing prices and we put ourselves at risk of political or price blackmailing. It is not necessary to use power in current world, the threat of power is sufficient. We realise that also people in China, India and Brazil, but also in the Russian Federation want to live in prosperity, fulfil their authorised and growing energy needs and quality food needs? Are we really convinced, we will enforce our own ambitious vision of fight against climatic changes without nuclear sources in Europe and in their countries on them? And if they follow this path, will we not care in the interest of our own safety for sources with a high degree of security and control? Those people, who think in this way and even support these ideas are really dangerous dreamers.

All these facts have led, I hope at least, the European Union to the change of its anti-nuclear attitude. One of the visible results of this change is also the organisation of these nuclear forums. For the time being we cannot speak about any renaissance of nuclear energy, it is merely the renaissance of speaking about nuclear energy. And I must say that this debate, this change of direction, comes five minutes to twelve. In the ambitious EU plans to provide for energy security (plan 20 20 20 until the year 2020) nuclear energy is not included at all. Despite the fact, that it is the low emissions source. Despite the fact that it is the source with

secured raw material for hundreds of years ahead. And if we also take into account thorium, we can speak about thousands of years. Will we have the courage to open the discussion about the French plan 30 30 until 2030? Will we have the courage to declare nuclear energy for low-carbon energy source and the means to fulfil binding goals of environment protection and increasing of energy security?

Even though the situation in the EU has been changing and nuclear energy does not represent a total taboo, the share of nuclear energy on energy production has been decreasing steadily. One to three reactors are closed each year, more than is being built. In other words, the real renaissance of nuclear energy can occur in some ten years – if we find the courage today to say that we need and will need nuclear energy and that without it our freedom as well as our independency may be endangered. We need courage and responsibility!

One of the goals of the European Nuclear Forums is to change this situation fundamentally. The Bratislava Nuclear Forum in November 2007 has started this process. It rather asked question without the ambition to find an immediate answer to them. Following this forum a lot of consultative meetings of experts were held, who thoroughly weighted various aspects of nuclear energy: its economic convenience, potential risks and finally also the ways to convince citizens about its necessity. We will learn their conclusions today and tomorrow, we will try to seek “Prague” answers to these “Bratislava” questions as to be able to discuss them “Europeanwise”. Concerning the Czech Republic I can say that more than 70 % of our citizens support the construction of new nuclear power stations.

Europe as a whole feels the insufficiency of energy sources. Even the Czech Republic, one of its biggest exporters can sometime after 2015 become dependent on import. The energy consumption - despite all of the saving measures, the reducing of energy demands of industry, despite great subsidies into a higher share of renewable sources – and thanks to great economic growth and increasing living standard will grow, conservatively approximately by one percentage a year. It would be extremely irresponsible to expect the contrary. However, the energy import will be a problem. A lot of other EU states will be in similar situation – unless some measures are taken.

We therefore need new sources. And we must act quickly because the construction of new power stations is a time-demanding process. According to the type of the power station we must count with at least seven to eight years, but maybe also thirteen to fifteen years before the power station starts supplying the current to the net. We thus practically do not have any

time for the decision. Will our citizens behave in a politically correct way when they try to turn on the light and the light will not shine? Will we manage to explain to them that we succumbed to cheap populism and that it was easier than to subsidise the construction of wind power stations? That rolling black-out is in fact normal?

Our country has not many alternatives. Energy production from gas will not certainly increase in our country. Nevertheless, it is very costly and from the perspective of energy security also risky, because it will further increase our already very high raw material dependency. The use of production from water has already reached its ceiling of its natural, technical and economic potential today, out of renewable sources the biomass has the greatest chance, it will not however cover the increase of consumption and the food price development should be a warning for us.

In reality we have only two options to secure sufficient amount of energy for the future: either coal or nuclear energy. However, if the construction of coal power stations should cover the whole consumption, it would involve exceeding our extraction limits. The reaction of the public to such a step would be strongly negative, also with regard to historical experience with reckless extraction in the totalitarian era. Not to speak about environmental impacts and not fulfilling our binding goals in the field of CO₂ emissions reduction.

The construction of new nuclear blocks represents the second option. Nuclear power stations represent an efficient and flexible source able to solve the growing demand and its fluctuations. Fissionable fuel can be bought in politically stable countries. Concerning the price, nuclear energy belongs today to the cheapest sources of energy. What is more, as I have already mentioned, it has very low emissions. Besides this the Czech Republic still has indispensable supplies of workable uranium.

It is time to stop merely talking about nuclear energy. The next European Nuclear Forum will take place during the Czech Presidency in Prague. One of its priorities will be energetics, its sustainability and security. I wish the next Nuclear Forum in Prague to take a visible step forward. That is to come from the discussion over to decisions, to final conclusions and to concrete recommendations for the European Commission and individual member states. To agree on the introduction of uniform European licence for new generations of nuclear reactors. To declare nuclear energy for low-emission energy source that is environmentally friendly. Not to ostracise nuclear energy so as it can become a part of politically correct vocabulary of a European politician and of European political parties.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you success in your proceedings and naturally I wish you a nice stay in Prague.