

Speech of the Czech Minister of Foreign Affairs Karel Schwarzenberg on "Democracy and Security International Conference" (Prague, June 5, 2007):

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to Prague . First of all let me congratulate the Prague Security Studies Institute, the Adelson Institute for Strategic Studies and FAES on bringing together such an impressive display of guests and speakers for their "Democracy and Security" conference. Needless to say, it is a pleasure to host this event here at the Cernin Palace . I think that everyone involved deserves a tremendous amount of appreciation for their effort to make this conference happen. Thank you and congratulations.

I personally know very well the small team who organized this event and I am well aware of the amount of work they have put into the preparations.

Before you start with the first panel, let me share with you just a few thoughts on the subject.

I think the interrelation between democracy and security is an extremely interesting topic. Not surprisingly, there is a whole myriad of opinions on the subject. Does democracy strengthen security or is it the other way around? What if democracy gives rise to undemocratic forces, which can destabilize whole countries and regions and thus undermine security substantially?

Does democracy strengthen security?

Well, we in Europe and North America tend to support the former view. In our opinion, democratic countries with accountable governments, rule of law and strong civil societies as a rule do not pose a threat either to their own citizens, or their neighbors. The prevailing notion is, that such societies do not initiate offensive actions, unless attacked or threatened. We feel that their strong civil societies, including independent media, make it more difficult for their political leaderships to deliberately start a dangerous adventure unless they have a good reason to do so. On the contrary, such societies tend to concentrate on mutual co-operation and economic and social development, all of which require a substantial degree of political freedom and economic and social stability and security. Since such countries usually have reasonably open economies and depend on a stable global environment, they tend to promote and encourage stability not only in their immediate vicinity but also on the global scale and do not generally resort to potentially destabilizing acts. From this point of view, democracy strengthens security. Its promotion should thus help stabilize large areas of the world, whose development has so far been threatened by extremism and wars.

Does democracy cause chaos and instability?

However, there are other views, warning against the idea of implementing democratic

principles in some parts of the world. The advocates of a more careful, even passive approach, have some strong arguments up their sleeves. They often point out, that political freedom for instance in Iraq has not brought the desired stability and the country is still facing serious security problems despite its modern and democratic constitution. Democratic elections in the Palestinian territories resulted in a victory of an organization, whose political visions certainly do not include, as it seems, strengthening security in the region. Democracy has not quite neutralized similarly dangerous elements in Lebanese politics. The rise of extremist elements in some of the elections in Middle East now seriously hinders progress towards political liberalization in other countries in the region.

But all over the world, there are countries with less liberal systems, even dictatorships, which look relatively stable and secure compared to more turbulent and more liberal countries, often still in transition, and therefore seem to be attractive for business.

Critics of rapid democracy promotion use all these examples to demonstrate that democracy does not cause stability, on the contrary – it creates chaos and insecurity. Unfortunately, such views increase the legitimacy of numerous dictatorships throughout the world, which is hardly a positive thing.

So, who is right? Is it actually worth trying to spread democracy in the world or has the current turmoil in some parts of the world already ruined its reputation for decades to come?

Democracy is worth promoting

Still, I think all of us in this room agree that democracy is worth promoting.

First of all, there are certain human rights that are unalienable and universal in nature. Freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of worship, the right for a due process of law or protection of life, cannot only be limited to certain geographic areas. Moreover, it is true, that democratic societies tend to spread stability and security, since their development and survival depend on them. That is why spreading democratic principles does increase security in the wider sense.

But how do we increase the overall level of democracy in the world without throwing parts of it into chaos, caused by formally democratic victories of undemocratic forces – unaccountable and out of control?

Strategy

Well, most importantly, we should be very careful in choosing **the right strategy** for introducing democratic elements in undemocratic countries. Maybe, before rushing into free elections, which usually terrifies the ruling elites and provokes often very problematic counter-reactions, we might first try to concentrate on the process of

institution-building – let us start with promoting a strong civil society, independent media, the rule of law and later proceed to establishing genuinely democratic political mechanisms.

The institute of **rule of law** is particularly important. I would even call it a precondition for democracy. The development of England into a cradle of democracy might have started with the trial of the Black Prince in the Middle Ages. Strong and independent judiciary as one of de Montesquieu's branches of power has been an essential element of American democracy since its very birth. Similarly, it was a stable and predictable legal environment with enforceable laws that led to the development of first democratic elements in Central European societies.

The rule of law forms the basis of long-term political and social stability and helps neutralize ideological excesses when they occur. Only after there is a strong and enforceable legal framework in place, can major political transition begin without concerns about democracy destroying itself by empowering non-democratic actors. The world would not have to fear a rogue group winning elections in any country, if there were legal mechanisms effective enough to prevent abuse of power.

In recent years, we often repeat the word "values". But values without strictly abiding by a set of rules can be an excuse for trespassing these rules and we can easily find ourselves on a highway to hell.

Tools

Equally important is the choice of **the right tools** for promoting democracy. It is obvious, that we should choose open dialogue over applying too much pressure. This does not mean we should not constantly watch for human rights abuses and criticize all countries that perform such actions. But we should also try as hard as we can to respect the traditions and lifestyles of societies we want to influence. Every society and every nation in the world have their sense of pride. Imposing our will hastily will hurt this pride and jeopardize our goal of strengthening democracy. Sometimes the word tolerance is mentioned. To be honest, I personally do not like this expression. I think mutual respect is much more important.

Showing respect and pursuing dialog with a willing and listening partner might move us forward – from minor steps in cultural, social and economic fields to more ambitious future political changes.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I do not think promoting democracy in today's world is an easy task. We have to walk the line to sensibly press for the right changes without destroying existing social structures, which might have dire consequences for regional or global stability. The task is not easy, but it is not impossible. I am sure this conference will provide some useful insights and maybe come up with some new ideas on the matter.

So once again, welcome in the house. I hope you will enjoy the whole day despite all the security procedures in Prague, today. Thank you for your attention.