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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

DATE: 05/17/93

NOTE FOR: GEORGE STEPHANOPOULOS

The President has reviewed the attached, and it is forwarded to you
for your:

Information ☒

Action ☐

Thank you.

JOHN D. PODESTA
Assistant to the President
and Staff Secretary
(x2702)

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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN

Address by President Václav Havel

at George Washington University

Washington, D.C.

The United States of America

To Bill Clinton
Václav Havel

April 22, 1993

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I remember a time when some of my friends and acquaintances used to go out of their way to avoid meeting me in the street. Though I certainly did not intend it to be so, they saw me, in a way, as a voice of their conscience. They knew that if they stopped and talked with me, they would feel compelled to apologize for not openly defying the regime too, or to explain to me why they could not do it, or to defend themselves by claiming that dissent was pointless anyway. Conversations like this were usually quite an ordeal for both sides, and thus it was better to stay away from them altogether.

Another reason for their behavior was the fear that the police were following me, and that just talking to me would cause them complications. It was easier not to go near me, thus they would avoid both an unpleasant conversation and the potential persecution that could follow. In short, I was, for those friends, an inconvenience. And inconveniences are best avoided.

For long decades, the chief nightmare of the democratic world was communism. Today — three years after it began to collapse like an avalanche — it would seem as though another nightmare has replaced it: post-communism. There were many, not just in the West, but in the East as well, who had been looking forward to the fall of communism for years, and who had hoped that its collapse would mean that history had at last come to its senses. Today, these same people are seriously worried about the consequences of that fall. Some of them may even feel a little nostalgic for a world that was, after all, slightly more transparent and understandable than the present one.

I do not share sentiments of that kind. I think we must not understand post–communism merely as something that makes life difficult for the rest of the world. I certainly did not understand communism that way. I saw it chiefly as a challenge, a challenge to thought and to action. To an even greater extent, post–communism represents just that kind of challenge.

Anyone who understands a given historical phenomenon merely as an inconvenience will ultimately see many other things the same way: the warnings of ecologists, public opinion, the vagaries of voters, public morality. It is an easy, and therefore seductive way of seeing the world and history. But it is extremely dangerous because we tend to remain aloof from things that inconvenience us and get in our way, just as some of my acquaintances avoided me during the communist era. Any position based on the feeling that the world, or history, is merely an accumulation of inconveniences inevitably leads to a turning away from reality, and ultimately, to resigning oneself to it. It leads to appeasement, even to collaboration. The consequences of such a position may even be suicidal.

What in fact do we mean by post–communism? Essentially, it is a term for the state of affairs in all the countries that have rid themselves of communism. But it is a dangerous simplification to put all these countries in one basket. While it is true that they are all faced with essentially the same task — that is, to rid themselves of the disastrous legacy of communism, to repair the damage it caused, and to create, or renew, democracy — at the same time, and for many reasons, there are great differences between them.

I will not go into all the problems encountered by post-communist countries; experts are no doubt already writing books on the subject. I will mention only some of the root causes of the phenomena that are arousing the greatest concern in the democratic West, phenomena such as nationalism, xenophobia, and the poor moral and intellectual climate which — to a greater or lesser extent — go along with the creation of the new political and economic system.

The first of these causes I see in the fact that communism was far from being simply the dictatorship of one group of people over another. It was a genuinely totalitarian system, that is, it penetrated every aspect of life and deformed everything it touched, including all the natural ways people had evolved of living together. It profoundly affected all forms of human behavior. For years, a specific structure of values and models of behavior was deliberately created in the consciousness of society. It was a perverted structure, one that went against all the natural tendencies of life, but society nevertheless internalized it, or rather was forced to internalize it.

When communist power and its ideology collapsed, this structure collapsed along with it. But people could not simply absorb and internalize a new structure immediately, one corresponding to the elementary principles of civic society and democracy. The human mind and human habits cannot be transformed overnight; to build a new system of living values and to identify with them simply takes time.

In a situation where one thing has collapsed and something new does not yet exist, many people feel empty and frustrated. This state is fertile ground for phenomena like the hunt for scapegoats, for radicalism of all kinds, and for the need to hide behind the anonymity of a group, be it socially or ethnically based. It encourages hatred of the world, self-affirmation at all costs, the feeling that everything is now permitted and the unparalleled flourishing of selfishness that goes

along with it. It gives rise to the search for a common and easily identifiable enemy, to political extremism, to the most primitive cult of consumerism, to a carpetbagging morality, stimulated by the historically unprecedented restructuring of property relations, and so on and so on. Thanks to its former democratic traditions and to its unique intellectual and spiritual climate, the Czech Republic, the westernmost of the post-communist countries, is relatively well off in this regard, compared with some of the other countries in the region. Nevertheless we too are going through the same great transformation that all the post-communist countries are, and we can therefore talk about it on the basis of inside knowledge.

Another factor that must be considered in any analysis of post-communist phenomena is the intrinsic tendency of communism to make everything the same. The greatest enemy of communism was always individuality, variety, difference — in a word, freedom. From Berlin to Vladivostok, the streets and buildings were decorated with the same red stars. Everywhere the same kind of celebratory parades were staged. Analogical state administrations were set up, along with the whole system of central direction for social and economic life. This great shroud of uniformity, stifling all national, intellectual, spiritual, social, cultural or religious variety, covered over any differences and created the monstrous illusion that we were all the same. The fall of communism destroyed this shroud of sameness, and the world was caught napping by an outburst of the many unanticipated differences concealed beneath it, each of which — after such a long time in the shadows — felt a natural need to draw attention to itself, to emphasize its uniqueness and its difference from others. This is the reason for the eruption of so many different kinds of oldfashioned patriotism, revivalist messianism, conservatism, and expressions of hatred towards all those who appeared to be betraying their roots or identifying with different ones.

The desire to renew and emphasize one's identity, one's uniqueness, is also behind the emergence of many new states. Nations that have never had

countries of their own feel an understandable need to experience independence. It is no fault of theirs that the opportunity has come up decades or even centuries after it came to other nations.

This is related to yet another matter: for a long time, communism brought history, and with it all natural development, to a halt. While the Western democracies have had decades to create a civil society, to build internationally integrated structures, and to learn the arts of peaceful international co-existence and cooperation, the countries ruled by communism could not go through this creative process. National and cultural differences were driven into the subterranean areas of social life, where they were kept on ice and thus prevented from developing freely, from taking on modern forms in the fresh air, from creating, over time, the free space of unity in variety.

At the same time many of the nations suppressed by communism had not even enjoyed freedom before its advent, and thus had not had a chance to resolve many of the basic questions of their existence as countries. Consequently thousands of unsolved problems have now suddenly burst forth into the light of day, problems left unsolved by history, problems we had wrongly supposed were long forgotten. It is truly astonishing to discover how, after decades of falsified history and ideological manipulation and massaging, nothing has been forgotten. Nations are now remembering their ancient achievements and their ancient suffering, their ancient suppressors and their allies, their ancient statehood, and their former borders, their traditional animosities and affinities — in short, they are suddenly recalling a history that, until recently, had been carefully concealed or misrepresented.

Thus in many parts of the so-called post-communist world, it is not just the regional order (sometimes referred to as the Yalta order) that is being corrected. There are also attempts to correct certain shortcomings in the Versailles order, and

even to go further back into history and exploit the greatest freedom some of them have ever had to make complete amends. It is an impossible desire, of course, but understandable nevertheless.

If we wish to understand the problems of the post-communist world, or some of them at least, then we must continually remind ourselves of something else. It is easy to deny the latent problems, ambitions, and particularities of nations. It is easy to make everything the same by force, to destroy the complex and fragile social, cultural and economic relationships and institutions built up over centuries, and to enforce a single, primitive model of central control in the spirit of a proud utopianism. It is as easy to do that as it is to smash a piece of antique, inlaid furniture with a single blow from a hammer. But it is infinitely more difficult to restore it all, or to create it directly.

The fall of the communist empire is an event on the same scale of historical importance as the fall of the Roman Empire. And it has similar consequences, both good and extremely disturbing. It means a significant change in the countenance of today's world. The change is painful and will take a long time. To build a new world on the ruins of communism might be as long and complex a task as the creation of a Christian Europe — after the great migrations — once was.

What are we to do if we do not wish to understand post-communism simply as a new inconvenience that would be better avoided by sticking our heads in the sand and minding our own business?

I think the most important thing is not just to take account of external and more or less measurable phenomena like the gross national product, the progress

of privatization, the stability of the political system and the measurable degree to which human rights are observed. All of these things are important, of course, but something more is necessary. There must be an effort to understand the deep events taking place in the womb of post-communist societies, to take note of their historical meaning and think about their global implications. It must be understood that these are not the curious woes of a distant and circumscribed part of the world, but events that concern everyone, and all of our present-day civilization. The temptation must be resisted to adopt a disparaging and slightly astonished attitude, one based on a subconscious feeling of superiority on the part of observers who are better off. Just as Czechs should not sneer at the problems of Tadzhikistan, so no one should sneer at the problems of the Czech Republic. Any point of departure, therefore, should involve deep insight and a deep sense of co-responsibility. It is only against this background of understanding that meaningful ways of assistance can be sought.

It seems to me that the challenge offered by the post-communist world is merely the current form of a broader and more profound challenge to discover a new type of self-understanding for man, and a new type of politics that should flow from that understanding. As we all know, today's planetary civilization is in serious danger. Modern man thinks of himself as the lord of creation and not just a part of it, and his vanity is rapidly destroying his hope of survival. Because he is not grounded in a humble respect for the order of Being, modern man allows himself to be driven by his particular interests. He is no longer capable of governing his behavior in a way that takes account of the general interest. We are rationally capable of describing, in vivid detail, all the dangers that threaten the world: the deepening gulf between the rich and the poor parts of the world, the population explosion, the potential for dramatic confrontations between different racial and cultural groups, the arming of whom no one seems able to stop, the nuclear threat, the plundering of natural resources, the destruction of the natural variety of species, the creation of holes in the ozone layer, and the unstoppable global warming. What is unsettling is

that the more we know about such dangers, the less able we seem to deal with them.

I see only one way out of this crisis: man must come to a new understanding of himself, his limitations, and his place in the world. He should grasp his responsibility in a new way, and reestablish a relationship with the things that transcend him. We must rehabilitate our human subjecthood, and liberate ourselves from the captivity of a purely rational perception of the world. Through this subjecthood and the individual conscience that goes with it, we must discover a new relationship to our neighbors, and to the universe and its metaphysical order, which is the source of the moral order.

We live in a world in which our destinies are tied to each other more closely than they ever have been before. It is a world with a single planetary civilization, yet it contains many cultures that, with increasing vigor and singlemindedness resist cultural unification, reject mutual understanding, and exist in what amounts to latent confrontation. It is a deeply dangerous state of affairs and it must be changed. The first step in this direction can be nothing less than a broad-based attempt by these cultures to understand each other, and to understand each other's right to existence. Only then can a kind of world-wide pluralistic metaculture, a self-preservational minimum on which everyone can agree, begin to form. It is only in the context of such a metaculture that a new sense of political responsibility — global responsibility — can come into being. And it is only with this newly born sense of responsibility that the instruments can be created that will allow humanity to confront all the dangers it has created for itself.

The new political self-understanding I am talking about clearly means a definitive departure from the understanding of the world that considers history, foreign cultures, foreign nations, and ultimately all those warning about our future, as a mere agglomeration of annoying inconveniences that disturb our tranquillity.

A quiet life on the peak of a volcano is just as illusory as the notion I talked about at the beginning: that by avoiding an encounter with a dissident in the street, we can avoid the problem of communism and the question of how to deal with it.

Ultimately, I understand post-communism as one of many challenges to contemporary man — regardless of what part of the world he lives in — to awaken to his global responsibilities, and to awaken to them before it is too late.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

This morning I had the honor of taking part in the opening of the Museum of the Holocaust.

On this occasion, as I have so often before, I asked myself how could this have happened? How could people in the twentieth century, aware of the theory of relativity, of quantum mechanics, who have penetrated to the heart of the atom and are exploring the reaches of outer space, have committed acts of horror so awful that to call them bestial would be to do an incredible disservice to all those creatures who happen not to be human. How could they have permitted it to happen?

In the context of what I have been talking about here, one aspect of a possible answer occurs to me. It was a failure of democracy, the politics of appeasement, giving way to evil: what in my country we call the spirit of Munich. The inability of Europe and the world to recognize the emerging evil in time and stop it

from growing to such monstrous proportions is merely another form of what I have called here an understanding of the world as an agglomeration of inconvenience. The issue here is the absence of a wider sense of responsibility for the world.

Czechs remember well a statement made by a democratic statesman shortly before he signed the Munich Agreement, the real beginning of all the horrors of the Second World War. He was appalled, he said then, that his country was digging trenches and trying on gas masks „because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing“. It is a classic example of how suicidal it is to try and avoid difficulties. This politician regarded Nazism as a problem that would go away if he stuck his head in the sand, or as it were crossed over to the other side of the street.

And so the chosen people were chosen by history to bear the brunt for all of us. The meaning of their sacrifice is to warn us against indifference to things we foolishly believe do not concern us.

In today's world, everything concerns everyone. Communism also concerned everyone. And it is also a matter of concern to everyone whether or not, and in what way, we manage to build a new zone of democracy, freedom, and prosperity on its ruins.

Every intellectual and material investment in the post-communist world that is not haphazard but based on a deep understanding of what is happening here, will repay the whole world many times over.

And not only that: it will also be one more step on the thorny journey of the human race towards a new understanding of its responsibility for its own destiny.

Thank you for your attention.

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

DATE: 05/17/93

NOTE FOR: HENRY CISNEROS

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for your:

Information ☒

Action ☐



Thank you.

JOHN D. PODESTA
Assistant to the President
and Staff Secretary
(x2702)

cc:

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN



To Henry Cisneros
Fgl -
BSC

Address by President Václav Havel

at George Washington University

Washington, D.C.

The United States of America

April 22, 1993

To Bill Clinton
Václav
Havel ♡

PHOTOCOPY
WJC HANDWRITING

Mr. President,

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Anyone who understands a given historical phenomenon merely as an inconvenience will ultimately see many other things the same way: the warnings of ecologists, public opinion, the vagaries of voters, public morality. It is an easy, and therefore seductive way of seeing the world and history. But it is extremely dangerous because we tend to remain aloof from things that inconvenience us and get in our way, just as some of my acquaintances avoided me during the communist era. Any position based on the feeling that the world, or history, is merely an accumulation of inconveniences inevitably leads to a turning away from reality, and ultimately, to resigning oneself to it. It leads to appeasement, even to collaboration. The consequences of such a position may even be suicidal.

What in fact do we mean by post-communism? Essentially, it is a term for the state of affairs in all the countries that have rid themselves of communism. But it is a dangerous simplification to put all these countries in one basket. While it is true that they are all faced with essentially the same task — that is, to rid themselves of the disastrous legacy of communism, to repair the damage it caused, and to create, or renew, democracy — at the same time, and for many reasons, there are great differences between them.

I will not go into all the problems encountered by post-communist countries; experts are no doubt already writing books on the subject. I will mention only some of the root causes of the phenomena that are arousing the greatest concern in the democratic West, phenomena such as nationalism, xenophobia, and the poor moral and intellectual climate which — to a greater or lesser extent — go along with the creation of the new political and economic system.

The first of these causes I see in the fact that communism was far from being simply the dictatorship of one group of people over another. It was a genuinely totalitarian system, that is, it penetrated every aspect of life and deformed everything it touched, including all the natural ways people had evolved of living together. It profoundly affected all forms of human behavior. For years, a specific structure of values and models of behavior was deliberately created in the consciousness of society. It was a perverted structure, one that went against all the natural tendencies of life, but society nevertheless internalized it, or rather was forced to internalize it.

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In a situation where one thing has collapsed and something new does not yet exist, many people feel empty and frustrated. This state is fertile ground for phenomena like the hunt for scapegoats, for radicalism of all kinds, and for the need to hide behind the anonymity of a group, be it socially or ethnically based. It encourages hatred of the world, self-affirmation at all costs, the feeling that everything is now permitted and the unparalleled flourishing of selfishness that goes

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Another factor that must be considered in any analysis of post-communist phenomena is the intrinsic tendency of communism to make everything the same. The greatest enemy of communism was always individuality, variety, difference — in a word, freedom. From Berlin to Vladivostok, the streets and buildings were decorated with the same red stars. Everywhere the same kind of celebratory parades were staged. Analogical state administrations were set up, along with the whole system of central direction for social and economic life. This great shroud of uniformity, stifling all national, intellectual, spiritual, social, cultural or religious variety, covered over any differences and created the monstrous illusion that we were all the same. The fall of communism destroyed this shroud of sameness, and the world was caught napping by an outburst of the many unanticipated differences concealed beneath it, each of which — after such a long time in the shadows — felt a natural need to draw attention to itself, to emphasize its uniqueness and its difference from others. This is the reason for the eruption of so many different kinds of oldfashioned patriotism, revivalist messianism, conservatism, and expressions of hatred towards all those who appeared to be betraying their roots or identifying with different ones.

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And not only that: it will also be one more step on the thorny journey of the human race towards a new understanding of its responsibility for its own destiny.

Thank you for your attention.

CS

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

DATE: 05/17/93

NOTE FOR: PHIL LADER

The President has reviewed the attached, and it is forwarded to you
for your:

Information ☒

Action ☐

Thank you.

JOHN D. PODESTA
Assistant to the President
and Staff Secretary
(x2702)

cc:

THE PRESIDENT HAS BEEN



To Phil Leder
Fgr - Bill

Address by President Václav Havel

at George Washington University

Washington, D.C.

The United States of America

April 22, 1993

To Bill Clinton
Václav
Havel

PHOTOCOPY
WJC HANDWRITING

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I remember a time when some of my friends and acquaintances used to go out of their way to avoid meeting me in the street. Though I certainly did not intend it to be so, they saw me, in a way, as a voice of their conscience. They knew that if they stopped and talked with me, they would feel compelled to apologize for not openly defying the regime too, or to explain to me why they could not do it, or to defend themselves by claiming that dissent was pointless anyway. Conversations like this were usually quite an ordeal for both sides, and thus it was better to stay away from them altogether.

Another reason for their behavior was the fear that the police were following me, and that just talking to me would cause them complications. It was easier not to go near me, thus they would avoid both an unpleasant conversation and the potential persecution that could follow. In short, I was, for those friends, an inconvenience. And inconveniences are best avoided.

For long decades, the chief nightmare of the democratic world was communism. Today — three years after it began to collapse like an avalanche — it would seem as though another nightmare has replaced it: post-communism. There were many, not just in the West, but in the East as well, who had been looking forward to the fall of communism for years, and who had hoped that its collapse would mean that history had at last come to its senses. Today, these same people are seriously worried about the consequences of that fall. Some of them may even feel a little nostalgic for a world that was, after all, slightly more transparent and understandable than the present one.

I do not share sentiments of that kind. I think we must not understand post—communism merely as something that makes life difficult for the rest of the world. I certainly did not understand communism that way. I saw it chiefly as a challenge, a challenge to thought and to action. To an even greater extent, post—communism represents just that kind of challenge.

Anyone who understands a given historical phenomenon merely as an inconvenience will ultimately see many other things the same way: the warnings of ecologists, public opinion, the vagaries of voters, public morality. It is an easy, and therefore seductive way of seeing the world and history. But it is extremely dangerous because we tend to remain aloof from things that inconvenience us and get in our way, just as some of my acquaintances avoided me during the communist era. Any position based on the feeling that the world, or history, is merely an accumulation of inconveniences inevitably leads to a turning away from reality, and ultimately, to resigning oneself to it. It leads to appeasement, even to collaboration. The consequences of such a position may even be suicidal.

What in fact do we mean by post—communism? Essentially, it is a term for the state of affairs in all the countries that have rid themselves of communism. But it is a dangerous simplification to put all these countries in one basket. While it is true that they are all faced with essentially the same task — that is, to rid themselves of the disastrous legacy of communism, to repair the damage it caused, and to create, or renew, democracy — at the same time, and for many reasons, there are great differences between them.

I will not go into all the problems encountered by post-communist countries; experts are no doubt already writing books on the subject. I will mention only some of the root causes of the phenomena that are arousing the greatest concern in the democratic West, phenomena such as nationalism, xenophobia, and the poor moral and intellectual climate which — to a greater or lesser extent — go along with the creation of the new political and economic system.

The first of these causes I see in the fact that communism was far from being simply the dictatorship of one group of people over another. It was a genuinely totalitarian system, that is, it penetrated every aspect of life and deformed everything it touched, including all the natural ways people had evolved of living together. It profoundly affected all forms of human behavior. For years, a specific structure of values and models of behavior was deliberately created in the consciousness of society. It was a perverted structure, one that went against all the natural tendencies of life, but society nevertheless internalized it, or rather was forced to internalize it.

When communist power and its ideology collapsed, this structure collapsed along with it. But people could not simply absorb and internalize a new structure immediately, one corresponding to the elementary principles of civic society and democracy. The human mind and human habits cannot be transformed overnight; to build a new system of living values and to identify with them simply takes time.

In a situation where one thing has collapsed and something new does not yet exist, many people feel empty and frustrated. This state is fertile ground for phenomena like the hunt for scapegoats, for radicalism of all kinds, and for the need to hide behind the anonymity of a group, be it socially or ethnically based. It encourages hatred of the world, self-affirmation at all costs, the feeling that everything is now permitted and the unparalleled flourishing of selfishness that goes

along with it. It gives rise to the search for a common and easily identifiable enemy, to political extremism, to the most primitive cult of consumerism, to a carpetbagging morality, stimulated by the historically unprecedented restructuring of property relations, and so on and so on. Thanks to its former democratic traditions and to its unique intellectual and spiritual climate, the Czech Republic, the westernmost of the post-communist countries, is relatively well off in this regard, compared with some of the other countries in the region. Nevertheless we too are going through the same great transformation that all the post-communist countries are, and we can therefore talk about it on the basis of inside knowledge.

Another factor that must be considered in any analysis of post-communist phenomena is the intrinsic tendency of communism to make everything the same. The greatest enemy of communism was always individuality, variety, difference — in a word, freedom. From Berlin to Vladivostok, the streets and buildings were decorated with the same red stars. Everywhere the same kind of celebratory parades were staged. Analogical state administrations were set up, along with the whole system of central direction for social and economic life. This great shroud of uniformity, stifling all national, intellectual, spiritual, social, cultural or religious variety, covered over any differences and created the monstrous illusion that we were all the same. The fall of communism destroyed this shroud of sameness, and the world was caught napping by an outburst of the many unanticipated differences concealed beneath it, each of which — after such a long time in the shadows — felt a natural need to draw attention to itself, to emphasize its uniqueness and its difference from others. This is the reason for the eruption of so many different kinds of oldfashioned patriotism, revivalist messianism, conservatism, and expressions of hatred towards all those who appeared to be betraying their roots or identifying with different ones.

The desire to renew and emphasize one's identity, one's uniqueness, is also behind the emergence of many new states. Nations that have never had

countries of their own feel an understandable need to experience independence. It is no fault of theirs that the opportunity has come up decades or even centuries after it came to other nations.

This is related to yet another matter: for a long time, communism brought history, and with it all natural development, to a halt. While the Western democracies have had decades to create a civil society, to build internationally integrated structures, and to learn the arts of peaceful international co-existence and cooperation, the countries ruled by communism could not go through this creative process. National and cultural differences were driven into the subterranean areas of social life, where they were kept on ice and thus prevented from developing freely, from taking on modern forms in the fresh air, from creating, over time, the free space of unity in variety.

At the same time many of the nations suppressed by communism had not even enjoyed freedom before its advent, and thus had not had a chance to resolve many of the basic questions of their existence as countries. Consequently thousands of unsolved problems have now suddenly burst forth into the light of day, problems left unsolved by history, problems we had wrongly supposed were long forgotten. It is truly astonishing to discover how, after decades of falsified history and ideological manipulation and massaging, nothing has been forgotten. Nations are now remembering their ancient achievements and their ancient suffering, their ancient suppressors and their allies, their ancient statehood, and their former borders, their traditional animosities and affinities — in short, they are suddenly recalling a history that, until recently, had been carefully concealed or misrepresented.

Thus in many parts of the so-called post-communist world, it is not just the regional order (sometimes referred to as the Yalta order) that is being corrected. There are also attempts to correct certain shortcomings in the Versailles order, and

even to go further back into history and exploit the greatest freedom some of them have ever had to make complete amends. It is an impossible desire, of course, but understandable nevertheless.

If we wish to understand the problems of the post-communist world, or some of them at least, then we must continually remind ourselves of something else. It is easy to deny the latent problems, ambitions, and particularities of nations. It is easy to make everything the same by force, to destroy the complex and fragile social, cultural and economic relationships and institutions built up over centuries, and to enforce a single, primitive model of central control in the spirit of a proud utopianism. It is as easy to do that as it is to smash a piece of antique, inlaid furniture with a single blow from a hammer. But it is infinitely more difficult to restore it all, or to create it directly.

The fall of the communist empire is an event on the same scale of historical importance as the fall of the Roman Empire. And it has similar consequences, both good and extremely disturbing. It means a significant change in the countenance of today's world. The change is painful and will take a long time. To build a new world on the ruins of communism might be as long and complex a task as the creation of a Christian Europe — after the great migrations — once was.

What are we to do if we do not wish to understand post-communism simply as a new inconvenience that would be better avoided by sticking our heads in the sand and minding our own business?

I think the most important thing is not just to take account of external and more or less measurable phenomena like the gross national product, the progress

of privatization, the stability of the political system and the measurable degree to which human rights are observed. All of these things are important, of course, but something more is necessary. There must be an effort to understand the deep events taking place in the womb of post-communist societies, to take note of their historical meaning and think about their global implications. It must be understood that these are not the curious woes of a distant and circumscribed part of the world, but events that concern everyone, and all of our present-day civilization. The temptation must be resisted to adopt a disparaging and slightly astonished attitude, one based on a subconscious feeling of superiority on the part of observers who are better off. Just as Czechs should not sneer at the problems of Tadzhikistan, so no one should sneer at the problems of the Czech Republic. Any point of departure, therefore, should involve deep insight and a deep sense of co-responsibility. It is only against this background of understanding that meaningful ways of assistance can be sought.

It seems to me that the challenge offered by the post-communist world is merely the current form of a broader and more profound challenge to discover a new type of self-understanding for man, and a new type of politics that should flow from that understanding. As we all know, today's planetary civilization is in serious danger. Modern man thinks of himself as the lord of creation and not just a part of it, and his vanity is rapidly destroying his hope of survival. Because he is not grounded in a humble respect for the order of Being, modern man allows himself to be driven by his particular interests. He is no longer capable of governing his behavior in a way that takes account of the general interest. We are rationally capable of describing, in vivid detail, all the dangers that threaten the world: the deepening gulf between the rich and the poor parts of the world, the population explosion, the potential for dramatic confrontations between different racial and cultural groups, the arming of whom no one seems able to stop, the nuclear threat, the plundering of natural resources, the destruction of the natural variety of species, the creation of holes in the ozone layer, and the unstoppable global warming. What is unsettling is

that the more we know about such dangers, the less able we seem to deal with them.

I see only one way out of this crisis: man must come to a new understanding of himself, his limitations, and his place in the world. He should grasp his responsibility in a new way, and reestablish a relationship with the things that transcend him. We must rehabilitate our human subjecthood, and liberate ourselves from the captivity of a purely rational perception of the world. Through this subjecthood and the individual conscience that goes with it, we must discover a new relationship to our neighbors, and to the universe and its metaphysical order, which is the source of the moral order.

We live in a world in which our destinies are tied to each other more closely than they ever have been before. It is a world with a single planetary civilization, yet it contains many cultures that, with increasing vigor and singlemindedness resist cultural unification, reject mutual understanding, and exist in what amounts to latent confrontation. It is a deeply dangerous state of affairs and it must be changed. The first step in this direction can be nothing less than a broad-based attempt by these cultures to understand each other, and to understand each other's right to existence. Only then can a kind of world-wide pluralistic metaculture, a self-preservational minimum on which everyone can agree, begin to form. It is only in the context of such a metaculture that a new sense of political responsibility — global responsibility — can come into being. And it is only with this newly born sense of responsibility that the instruments can be created that will allow humanity to confront all the dangers it has created for itself.

The new political self-understanding I am talking about clearly means a definitive departure from the understanding of the world that considers history, foreign cultures, foreign nations, and ultimately all those warning about our future, as a mere agglomeration of annoying inconveniences that disturb our tranquillity.

A quiet life on the peak of a volcano is just as illusory as the notion I talked about at the beginning: that by avoiding an encounter with a dissident in the street, we can avoid the problem of communism and the question of how to deal with it.

Ultimately, I understand post-communism as one of many challenges to contemporary man — regardless of what part of the world he lives in — to awaken to his global responsibilities, and to awaken to them before it is too late.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

This morning I had the honor of taking part in the opening of the Museum of the Holocaust.

On this occasion, as I have so often before, I asked myself how could this have happened? How could people in the twentieth century, aware of the theory of relativity, of quantum mechanics, who have penetrated to the heart of the atom and are exploring the reaches of outer space, have committed acts of horror so awful that to call them bestial would be to do an incredible disservice to all those creatures who happen not to be human. How could they have permitted it to happen?

In the context of what I have been talking about here, one aspect of a possible answer occurs to me. It was a failure of democracy, the politics of appeasement, giving way to evil: what in my country we call the spirit of Munich. The inability of Europe and the world to recognize the emerging evil in time and stop it

from growing to such monstrous proportions is merely another form of what I have called here an understanding of the world as an agglomeration of inconvenience. The issue here is the absence of a wider sense of responsibility for the world.

Czechs remember well a statement made by a democratic statesman shortly before he signed the Munich Agreement, the real beginning of all the horrors of the Second World War. He was appalled, he said then, that his country was digging trenches and trying on gas masks „because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing“. It is a classic example of how suicidal it is to try and avoid difficulties. This politician regarded Nazism as a problem that would go away if he stuck his head in the sand, or as it were crossed over to the other side of the street.

And so the chosen people were chosen by history to bear the brunt for all of us. The meaning of their sacrifice is to warn us against indifference to things we foolishly believe do not concern us.

In today's world, everything concerns everyone. Communism also concerned everyone. And it is also a matter of concern to everyone whether or not, and in what way, we manage to build a new zone of democracy, freedom, and prosperity on its ruins.

Every intellectual and material investment in the post-communist world that is not haphazard but based on a deep understanding of what is happening here, will repay the whole world many times over.

And not only that: it will also be one more step on the thorny journey of the human race towards a new understanding of its responsibility for its own destiny.

Thank you for your attention.