

Beat: Politics

SPEECH BY JEAN YVES LE DRIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER AT CONFERENCE BEYOND 1989

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USPA NEWS - Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, attended the conference "Beyond 1989: Hopes & Disillusions after Revolutions" held in Prague, 6 December 2019, and made a remarkable speech, that is now published by USPA, in two sections. This is the first section of the remarks, by the French foreign Affairs Minister addressed at Charles university, Prague, alongside, Mr Thomas Zima Rector of Charles University, and Jerome Heurtaux, Director of the Academy of Sciences, head CEFRES. Here is the full transcript of the speech. « Dear friends, Thirty years have passed since 1989. A generation, who have gone from euphoria to doubt. I am profoundly European and I must say Europe is what drives my political engagement. I remember the enthusiasm and the jubilation of those days that, in autumn 1989, would change the face of our continent and would move all peoples of Europe, without exception. What strikes me today, as French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, is that as each decade passes, we are less enthusiastic and less united in celebrating the commemorations of 1989. Jean Yves le Drian stated as an introduction. This is Part 2 of the Speech

VACLAV HAVEL IS TO BE NEVER FORGOTTEN AND THOUGHT OF AND BELOVED-----

I have thus come first to pay tribute to those who, thirty years ago, rose up and imposed on dumbfounded governments "the power of the powerless" to quote the famous words of Václav Havel. Václav Havel is a name that I cannot say here without thinking of the morning of 9 December 1988, which Tomáš mentioned earlier, and the historic meeting between François Mitterrand and eight Czech dissidents, one of whom was to become the first President of a liberated country. I am proud, very proud, that France recognized his struggle as it did. And the following year, we were many in France to watch with admiration and enthusiasm the peoples of Central Europe who took control of their destinies and who chose to write their own history, indeed not only their history, but our history: that of Europe reunified. With them, I would also like to salute the memory of the dissidents whose spirit of resistance, in a way, paved the way for this leap. I am thinking of Jan Palach, and of course of Václav Havel and Jan Patočka and all those who brought forward Charter 77. I am thinking of Father Popiełuszko, the chaplain of Solidarność, and of so many others, including the students in Budapest in 1956 who fought for freedom.

I KNOW THAT 1989 ALSO SYMBOLIZES REGAINED INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY-----

I have mentioned 1989 and freedom, but I know that 1989 also symbolizes regained independence and sovereignty for all the countries under Soviet control. The 1989 revolutions ended the Brezhnev Doctrine, this theory of limited sovereignty drawn up after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Soviets and their allies on 21 August 1968, after great hope was brought by the Prague Spring. And it was again here in Prague that this doctrine was done away with when the Warsaw Pact was officially dissolved on 1 July 1991.-----

This sovereignty restored thirty years ago should make us attentive to the reticence expressed here or elsewhere regarding the notion of "European sovereignty" and I will come back to this point later. And I understand the attachment of former Eastern Bloc countries to national sovereignty, this valuable thing that they had only enjoyed on and off. This is also why those who must choose their alliances or their lack of alliance are the countries concerned, and the peoples constituting them, and not third parties.-----

Finally, the freedom regained in 1989 is that of the entire European continent. As I have already said, I prefer the word reunification of Europe, which brings us closer, to enlargement, which distances us from each other. "To call things by the wrong name is to add to the world's misfortune", Albert Camus once said. Something that is wrongly named cannot be apprehended precisely.-----

This regained freedom and this history, which you have written with courage you the Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian and Romanian peoples and more were also ours. You returned them to us. The freedom of Europe, including Western Europe, was limited by the servitude of Central Europe and the Soviet buffer zone. 1989 marked the end of Yalta, an order to which we were subjected but that France never accepted. More than a "return to Europe" which Central European countries had never left, as Milan Kundera noted it affirmed a geographical but also cultural and therefore political fact that was sometimes complacently neglected: the unity of the European continent.-----

I would like to say, Ladies and Gentlemen, to resume what Tomáš said earlier, that "Eastern Europe" as such never existed. It was a fabrication of the Cold War, not a relevant division arising from Europe's long history. With 1989, for the first time, Europe, which had long been deprived of a vital portion, had the opportunity to play a role in its history and no longer merely be subjected to it. And those who use the lack of unity in Europe today as an argument to criticize the European project are wrong. The unity of our continent is not an abstract idea or a political slogan or an "intellectual's musing"; it is a tangible reality for all Europeans who enjoy on a daily basis this freedom of movement which was gained at such a high price.

Perhaps one of the most disastrous consequences of the 2015 refugee crisis are these borders that have been closed, these walls that have been erected, and this challenging of the area of free movement created by the Schengen Agreements. Because Schengen is, with the euro or, in another area, Erasmus, one of the most tangible and visible signs of European unification. These achievements are as necessary as they are fragile, as is European integration. When faced with doomsayers who are so ready to give lectures, often motivated by elections, it is important to always remember what together we have been able to build to the benefit of our peoples.

The horizon of this memory that draws on several sources of 1989 is, of course, our common European project. I would like now to share the conclusions I have drawn from this reflection on our common history for our common future.

The project that France promotes, with you, is a project of European humanism, which begins with the uncompromising defence of our values and our principles. It is a project of social, economic and fiscal convergence, as Tomáš recalled. For there is an urgent need to address disillusion and bridge European divides. They do not constitute a new wall between "two Europes" co-existing within the European Union. Inequalities, populist temptations, and the loss of meaning and common references are shared problems for all of us. We should consider them to be common problems.

THIS IS A PROJECT OF EUROPEAN WORKING FOR OUR PEOPLES

This is a project of European power working for our peoples in the face of the excesses of globalization and challenges of international competition. More than ever, international unrest and brutal expression of power struggles are structuring life internationally. Europe has a choice: to accept this situation and risk seeing its own choices be dictated, or assert itself to make a difference every time it so requires, for its identity and its principles. With no hesitation, I choose the second option. Why? Because we have known, since the time of Paul Valéry, that civilizations are mortal. How? By having Europe take charge of its own destiny. And overall, there is an obvious fact that I need to recall: we can only hope to complete this project, over time, if we are able to guarantee our security.

That is why I believe that we cannot bring up 1989, when Europe was reunified around democratic principles and humanist values, without mentioning 1990 and the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. What was its aim? To build European collective security by putting to work the ten great principles adopted in 1975 in Helsinki.

This ambition to build European collective security, which was so present in the early 1990s, gradually faded away. This ambition needs to be revived.

Little by little, we have seen the unravelling of the components that helped establish the security architecture set out in the Charter of Paris and we have witnessed a methodical effort to deconstruct which has led to the progressive, systematic and now nearly comprehensive dismantling of all the violence regulation instruments, from confidence-building measures to arms limitation and reduction treaties, whatever their category. And all things considered, a danger void is opening up and the threat of conflict, be it accidental or deliberate, is looming over our continent once again. The growing number of military incidents is proof of this. Remaining true to the promises of 1989 means seeking to resolve this instability and reducing these risks.

Since the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, which showed Europeans what their own responsibilities were in ensuring the security of their continent, other threats have emerged. I am not only thinking of hyper-violence of terrorism. In Europe, war is back in Georgia and Ukraine. Chemical weapons have been used on the soil of a major European city. Cyber attacks have sought to sabotage and undermine the foundations of our democracies, our electoral processes and our public debates.

Some seem to have resigned themselves to this. But we, Europeans, after the horrible tragedies that brought devastation to our continent throughout the 20th century, cannot accept them. That is why we cannot content ourselves with the status quo regarding Russia, whose aggressive actions have, we know, shaken up our strategic environment over the past ten years.

So what do we need to guarantee our security and return to the promises of November 1990 when, in Paris, this Charter to overhaul the principles of European security architecture was adopted?

We above all need the transatlantic relationship. We, the French people, also want to preserve it. We need it, politically, militarily, and strategically. And particularly in the military operations we are conducting in the Levant and the Sahel region, alongside Czech forces. Which does not rule out considering developments with lucidity and drawing all the ensuing conclusions. Everyone understands that the time when Europe could entirely entrust others with taking care of its security and depend exclusively on them has passed. And this movement did not start when President Trump was elected. What we call in Europe strategic autonomy and which, in fact,

corresponds exactly to the notion of burden sharing, is a condition for a strong and credible transatlantic relationship. Moreover, some of our American partners suggest that our ability to act for ourselves is precisely what makes France Washington's best partner when it comes to defence.

WE NEED THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP AND ALSO NEED NATO-----

We need the transatlantic relationship, and also need NATO to remain what it ultimately was for every one of us after 1989: a stabilizing force. That is why France wanted to start discussion on the current malaise in the Atlantic Alliance. The Summit that was just held in London launched genuine strategic discussion in NATO. We were both there. This was necessary, in the very name of continuity and consolidation of the transatlantic relationship. The absolute condition for a strong Atlantic Alliance is now that Europeans act more proactively and shoulder more of the responsibilities, within an overhauled and rebalanced alliance. There cannot be European defence without NATO just as there cannot be a credible and sustainable NATO without strengthening European responsibilities.-----

We have thought this for a long time and France is committed concretely to NATO's deterrence and defence posture, for example in Baltic States and in the Black Sea. France respects the security interests of all of our European partners, which it has made entirely its own. It will always defend them as an absolute priority, as President Macron recalled yesterday in London. We are and will always be uncompromising when our sovereignty and that of our partners and allies is at stake. Our allies can count on France, on its engagement and on its armed forces. Always.-----

Thirdly, we need our security to be organized in Europe so that it can ensure strategic stability across the continent. This is why NATO's approach of "deterrence and dialogue"^[2] has been used since 1967 and the Harmel Report. That is also the intention of President Macron's proposal for a European security and confidence-building architecture.-----

We need to be clear, and I want to stress this here: if we are to roll back the systematic dismantling I just mentioned, it is with Russia with whom we must re-establish dialogue. Without taking a soft line or being naive, to defend the security of all Europeans and by entering into power struggles every time it is needed. But we cannot simply ignore geography.

The initiatives that we have taken, we have created in strict compliance with agreed European principles. And we do not intend to neglect the security interests of our European partners; on the contrary, as they are also ours-----

That is why we want Europe to address the major strategic, military and nuclear issues that concern its security directly. These include the reconstruction of a legal framework and transparency that should limit the risks of involuntary military escalation, set limits on the capacities of our potential adversaries and thus reduce the threat.-----

With the termination of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the uncertainties looming ahead of 2021 over the New START Treaty, Europe could find itself becoming the theatre of a relentless and lawless military and nuclear competition. We have not experienced such a situation since the end of the 1960s after the Berlin and Cuba crises.

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