**The Address of Colonel Pavel Vranský**

**on the occasion of The Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust**

**and Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity**

**Senate of the Czech Parliament**

**January 27, 2017**

Dear Mr. President of the Senate of the Czech Parliament,

Dear Mr. Vice-Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honoured to have an opportunity to address this assembly on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Day of Prevention of Inhumane Crimes, on the day when we remember the events that left a mark on mankind in the past, the events the people shall never forget.

The eyewitnesses of this historical period of time are slowly passing from this world and their experience, which is still perceived as a vivid memory by current generation, will become a more and more distant episode in the history of mankind as seen from the perspective of the future generations. Nevertheless, as well as the nations and countries may only exist if they manage to preserve their heritage the mankind may only be mankind if they manage to preserve the remembrance of the crimes that shall never repeat again.

It will have to be commemorated again and again in pictures as well as words; fortunately this all has been written in books, memories and films.

Allow me to speak from my own experience that goes back to the past and that is linked to what we are commemorating today.

There were 3 men and 1 woman in my close family: my mother, my father, my younger brother and me. I loved my mother a lot. She committed a truly heroic deed, she put herself out for the rest of her family; she packed our things for our leaving for abroad and stayed alone with her elderly father. This decision was fateful to her. She passed away, like many other people, in the concentration camp. If she had survived, she could have been proud of herself for saving her close family since all three of us survived the war.

My brother fought Nazi in Italy during WWII. My father, an officer of Czechoslovak Army before the war, had not managed to be enlisted a member of Czechoslovak Exile Units of WWII and that neither in Poland nor in Great Britain, he later worked as a worker in military production in Britain.

My destiny was a bit different from my father's and brother's. I was born only 3 years after the independent Czechoslovakia had been established. While studying secondary school in Ostrava, I was lucky to be a student of a brilliant history teacher, who fought as a member of Czechoslovak Legion in Russia. This teacher had this fantastic skill to present the fight for freedom and independence of then non-existing country in a gripping way. I then realized what patriotism meant; the heroes of that time fought and risked their lives for the country that only existed as a vision of politicians like Professor Masaryk, Dr Beneš and General Štefánik. The country was built on the legends and historical facts by those great men who made it a true island of democracy surrounded by fascist countries and countries that started to follow the ideals of fascism.

I started to contemplate these matters and when it came to the occupation of European countries by the Nazi Germany, I had a clear idea of where I wanted to head. As an 18-year-old man, after I had crossed the Polish borders, I got enlisted to a forming Czechoslovak military unit and fought at various battlefields till the end of WWII.

After my return to the homeland I stayed in Czechoslovakia, although the political situation had changed. The thought of emigration, though there were several occasions for me to emigrate, was unacceptable. I had a feeling that doing this would betray my effort and ideals to liberate my country. Let's have a look at the world of nowadays. Our time could enter the history books as a time where people had no visions, ideals, values and sense of life. Creating the paradise on Earth has always been a drive for the progress of mankind.

An incident that happened on the occasion of 2016 Czech Singer/Music Group of the Year Awards called “Zlaty Slavík” (Golden Nightingale) could serve as a good example. Majority of the young citizens admire popular music, which is natural, we did the same when we were young. Part of these Awards, though, was a performance and appreciation of the group, whose frontman sings in a music band Ortel, which sings songs with racist lyrics. Czech singer and celebrity, Radoslav Banga, staged a protest during that ceremony in a way that he left the music hall while Ortel band were being awarded a prize, Banga later published his reasons for leaving the hall. The Czech music celebrities present at the ceremony criticised his protest instead of supporting it. For expressing his attitude, Mr Banga later faced an outburst of hatred including calls for “sending him to the gas chambers”. The threats had gone too far and Banga had to be given police protection. All this happened in the name of “freedom of speech”. This was just a little example picturing the overall mood in Czech society nowadays.

Czech political scene of nowadays promotes the principles of “political correctness". This term stands in a contradiction to a true and open depiction of history and various social and economic features and serves as an excuse for sensitive proclamations or deeds of leading Czech politicians.

One of the effects of the political correctness is ever fading history of WWII, which is often distorted. The world is deemed to forget the fact Rudolf Vrba, a survivor of an escape from Auschwitz, called as “the biggest organised robbery murder supported by the majority of Nazified German nation”.

People seem to forget about the Holocaust trains from the end of WWII, people forget the stories of Russian soldiers - of the eye-witnesses - passing the liberated territory at the end of the war, who had been discovering the debris of burnt down barns, where defeated soldiers burnt hundreds of local people at once or wells filled with corpses of mothers and their children. We shall forget that at the end of the war there were Wehrwolves and Volkssturm who had a clear mission in our territory - to kill and sabotage the restoration of the country.

The ideologies, whose goal was to take over the world, have always existed. The „Idea“ should have unified all nations under its rule. Sumerian (Gilgamesh), Ancient Egypt (Amon), The Roman Empire or powerful religions – these ideologies could have been shared and promoted by people of different races and origin. Nevertheless, the Nazism, or better said “a mutated German nationalism”, does not only declare war on the whole world, but also on all races and nations.

Our society and other European societies are divided into the irreconcilable groups. One of the reasons for that is the migrant wave. Both groups agree on the need for help to these emigrants, who are fleeing their countries for saving their lives. Nevertheless, the masses of people who have been coming illegally for living a better life without any effort to fight for it in their own country or integrate into the host country societies, require a different approach.

I am an old man. My life experience has taught me that nothing is ever black and white. The democracy requires compromises that should not endanger its fundament. The democracy should be able to protect itself.

The contradictions within the society make a ground for the rise of extremist movements that, similar to what Hitler and Mussolini did in the 30s of last century, cast the world into adversity.

What we see today does not correspond to what we fought for. We fought for freedom, for social justice and for the peace in the world. The wars bring terror and are ground for evil, Holocaust alone serving as a good example of that. The wars leave millions of dead people behind.

Let’s face it. None of those ideals we fought for has yet come true. Those ideals, though, are still live and immortal and the best of us are still fighting for them and will fight for them in the future, too.

Thank you for listening.