

Czechs have less to fear from Russia than EU - Klaus, press



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Washington - Czech President Vaclav Klaus is not afraid that the Barack Obama administration's decision not to deploy missile defences in the Czech Republic would bring the Czech Republic the threat of Russia, he said in an interview in the daily Washington Post published today.

He said the decision did not surprise him and would have "no practical consequences" for Europe's strategic defence.

"I fully accept this decision," Klaus, who arrived in Washington on Sunday and flew to New York later on Monday to attend the U-N. General Assembly, said.

He added that he had never been convinced of the strategic value of the proposed system.

"I do not think it is necessary to demonise it," Klaus said.

"For me, the threat of the Soviet Union in the past was enormous because it influenced my life every day," Klaus said.

Now, "the threat coming from that part of the world is much, much smaller," he added.

Twenty years after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic has less to fear from Russia than from an overregulated European Union, Klaus said.

In the interview, Klaus voiced concern about the impact of EU regulations.

"We now live in a much more regulated society than we were 20 years ago, just before the fall of communism," he said, a situation that the president, widely known as a Euro-sceptic, called "frustrating."

"Whether we will be able to keep our identity as a state is for me an issue," he said.

Klaus strongly opposes the Lisbon Treaty, an agreement reached among European Union members in 2007 that has not been ratified by all members as required. The treaty would bring about greater integration within the union and give new powers to Europe-wide officials and bodies at the expense of national governments.

In his interview Klaus expressed satisfaction with the U.S.-Czech relations.

"They remain solid and extensive," he said.

He attributed headlines in some Czech newspapers criticizing the U.S. decision to scrap the missile defense plan that was put forward by the George W. Bush administration as a topic used in internal politics before national elections.

In fact, he said, public opinion polls in the Czech Republic consistently have shown that about 70 percent of the population opposed the deployment of the radar system in the country.

Klaus backed Russia that had opposed the plan for the stationing of U.S. missile defence elements in the Czech Republic and Poland from the very beginning.

He said while Russia had not evolved as quickly toward democracy as East European governments with a pre-communist history of democracy, "the political system and freedom in Russia is now the highest and the best in the history of Russia in the last two millennia."

Klaus repeated his view on global warming and said that it was "humbug" and "nonsense."

Klaus made his remarks one day before attending today's summit in New York about climate change, which most other nations and politicians view as a significant threat to the environment and human and animal life.

On Monday, Klaus delivered a speech on the 20th anniversary of the fall of communism in central and eastern Europe at the conservative Washington Cato institute.

The Czech daily Hospodarske noviny writes today that Klaus spoke about the U.S. decision not to build a missile defence radar base in the Czech Republic as a less important moment in the country's history.

He said he personally had never considered it a big topic.

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