

Open letter to Jean-Claude JUNCKER requesting his clear political distance from words of his spokesman

Dear Mr. President,

Fidel Castro, one of the longest serving world dictators, died last Friday on 25th November. The repressive regime in Cuba led hundreds of thousands of people to flee the country. Human rights were constantly repressed and countless number political prisoners suffered from inhumane conditions of Cuban prisons. The European Parliament officially recognized the oppressive regime in Cuba by awarding the Sakharov prize in 2005 to the Ladies in White, an opposition movement formed by family members of 75 "political dissidents" including human rights defenders, journalists, poets, doctors and librarians sentenced up to 28 years in prison. None of this was mentioned in your statement.

While we were concerned about your reaction to Castro's death, we were deeply shocked and saddened by the words chosen by your spokesman Mr. Margaritis Schinas when questioned about your statement at the European Commission midday briefing on 28 November. Mr. Schinas was asked about Castro's support to the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which led to an occupation of our countries that lasted for two decades. The response by Mr. Schinas was arrogant and portrayed shocking ignorance of facts with a total lack of understanding history.

Let us remind you that the events of the Prague Spring and the subsequent actions of the Soviet Union in our countries don't represent a "narrow view of reality" as your spokesperson alluded to. It meant a whole lot more than that for the citizens of Czechoslovakia who had to endure several more years of dictatorship. It means much more than that to the citizens of today's Czech and Slovak Republic who still bear the scars of a brutal, totalitarian regime.

The Prague Spring did not only change the way Czechs and Slovaks relate to the world, but it was a major turning point in 20th-century European history. In no way nor circumstance does this portray "a narrow view of reality". Nor is it "a value judgement". It is a fact and it will remain a fact forever. The Soviet reaction to the Prague Spring is a European tragedy and Mr. Castro's support to Moscow shows he was on the wrong side of history.

We, the elected representatives of the Czech and Slovak citizens, who suffered from political persecutions in numerous cases and whose lives will be forever marked by the 1968 events and world's reaction to them, strongly oppose the "narrow view of reality" accusations. We want to ensure our citizens that the EU is consistent in defending our main values, including the freedom of speech and human rights for everyone in all member states. As the guardian of the treaty, we truly hope that the European Commission, the President and his Spokesperson understand what this means.

Hereby we would like to ask you for your clear political distance from the words of your Spokesperson, be it in written or in a public speech.

Yours sincerely

MEPs from the Czech and Slovak Republic

signed in Brussels on 1 December 2016

(List of signatory MEPs is below)

List of signatory Members of the European Parliament from the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic:

Miroslav Poche

Evžen Tošenovský

Tomáš Zdechovský

Pavel Poc

Ivan Štefanec

Jan Zahradil

Petr Ježek

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