

President Václav Klaus: EU Authoritarianism & War with Russia

Václav Klaus is a Czech economist and politician who served as prime minister (1993–97) and president (2003–13) of the Czech Republic. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Buy merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. Today we are joined by President Václav Klaus, who served as the first prime minister of the Czech Republic and thereafter served as the second president of the Czech Republic. So thank you for coming back on the program, sir. It's great to see you. My question to you was about this speech by the EU Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, who, well, in what is known as the State of the Union address, she made a speech, and you pushed back with an article being very critical. And I wanted to know what your main criticism was about her speech.

#Václav Klaus

So, good morning. Very good. Thank you for calling me. You said new president. Madame von der Leyen is not a new president. She has been in her office since 2019, but in her speech now, last Wednesday's speech, she pretends to start anew as if nothing happened in the past. But she is responsible for the developments in the European Union in the last six years and probably will stay there in that position in the future. So there is nothing new. There is a continuation of a wrong way of going ahead, plus a very aggressive and arrogant speech, which is something I can't stand, really. So therefore, it motivated me to write a speech—to write a comment. It was now published in various servers and newspapers. So, I'm ready to talk about it.

#Glenn

One of the things you're critical of was her language. That is, she argued that our democracies are dismantled by, in her words, lackeys and puppets of authoritarians. Again, you often link this kind of rhetoric to your time under communism.

#Václav Klaus

I spent 40 years of my life, which is almost half of my life, in the communist era. So we are sensitive, maybe oversensitive, to using such phrases, because that was what I... And we were listening to the radio speeches discussing American imperialism and lackeys and puppets in the hands of American imperialism. Now to hear it again after almost 40 years after the fall of communism is really tragic. Maybe we are oversensitive, but that's probably justified. We spent decades in communism, so we can be oversensitive.

#Glenn

You know, that makes sense. You also mentioned something, a comment you have made about opening the way for Canada to become the EU's first associated member. You, as well as others, reacted to this.

#Václav Klaus

Of course, the U.S. president reacted very radically to it and said that it's really, I don't remember the word, but a ridiculous and hostile idea, of course. But what...

#Glenn

Really, we spent years discussing the EU.

#Václav Klaus

And I know that the institution of an associated membership doesn't exist in Europe. It was rejected by European member states. And, of course, the European Commission tried to present this idea some eight years ago in a memo, but it was rejected. But now she announces, Madame von der Leyen announces, as if it's a normal idea to have an associated member. So it demonstrates that she doesn't pay attention to the people in European member states of the EU.

#Glenn

Well, as you pointed out, she's been the Commission's president since 2019, so she's not new. But she complains about the bureaucracy and the need to kickstart the European economy. Wouldn't this be a reference to her own performance to some extent?

#Václav Klaus

This is another important point. She allows herself to criticize bureaucracy and the EU. It is a joke because she introduces one bureaucratic rule after another, one bureaucratic institution after another. Every day there is something new, and it shows that she doesn't understand anything. But my point is that my own communist experience is that everything was prohibited in the communist

era. Just what was allowed was to criticize bureaucracy, because even the system considered something wrong. Of course, bureaucracy is the result of a system, not something additional to the system. So bureaucracy is a definitional part of the institution called European Union, in my eyes. So when she criticizes it, it's a joke. It's not a serious statement.

#Glenn

Another issue, though, in your article was her statement that Russia cut us off from gas supplies. And I think this is—if you had any thoughts about this—because a huge problem now for the Europeans appears to be the energy prices. I mean, this is producing deindustrialization. So how do you see this? Well, I guess her comments also in light of the energy challenges we're currently facing here.

#Václav Klaus

Probably she knows what's going on, but she pretends not to know, because to say that Russia cut us off from the gas supplies is a joke. It's not a serious statement. We did it ourselves. It was the European decision. Of course, in my eyes, wrong decision, but in any case, our decision, EU decision, not Russia's decision. Russia would be absolutely happy to deliver gas to the European customers and to get the money for it. So Russia didn't cut us off from that. And that Madame von der Leyen even mentioned that is almost unbelievable for me.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, she also makes these comments about taking the future into our own hands again. And I thought this was interesting because it's a comment about her role, but seemingly it also says something about the relationship between the EU and European nations, and Europe as a continent. I thought this was quite interesting. Yeah.

#Václav Klaus

Madame von der Leyen permanently substitutes the word Europe for the word European Union. This is something that I can't stand. I can't survive that. Of course, we know that Europe is a continent, whereas the European Union is a man-made institution created by organizational decisions. So she permanently pretends to speak on behalf of Europe. I don't think it's allowed for her to say anything like that. But she is not alone in this respect. This is a typical situation. This is a typical attitude presented in Brussels almost every day, but I can't accept it. I remember when we entered the European Union 23 years ago already. I remember that I visited the European countries, and everyone was telling me, all the presidents and prime ministers were telling me, "Welcome to Europe." And I said, "Excuse me, we belong to Europe for centuries all the time. What has changed was entering the European Union." But the people, the Brussels people,

#Glenn

I call it sometimes.

#Václav Klaus

You know, they suppose that they are Europe, but they are not.

#Glenn

Well, in the '90s and 2000s, there were a lot of discussions around this because the British were always making the point, you know, what is Europe? Is it the concentration of power in Brussels, or is it the nation-state? Because they said, well, the nation-state is Europe. And then you have other countries like Russia saying, well, we are the largest country in Europe, but we're the only one who's not part of, you know. So it does create a lot of conceptual problems. On the topic of Russia, though, because this has been a key theme now we've seen over time, I saw that the current prime minister of the Czech Republic, Andrej Babiš, he was warning that we should talk more about peace. And also your colleague in Slovakia, the prime minister of Slovakia, Robert Fico, he was worried that European leaders often make rhetoric about war to distract from problems at home. And if they're provoking a war with Russia, then he doesn't want to send Slovakian soldiers to fight the Russians. Do you see the situation getting dire?

#Václav Klaus

Well, I am really, especially with the new position of Chancellor Merz in Germany, I am afraid for the first time in my life, and this is already a long life. I was born in the Second World War, but for the first time in my adult life, I am afraid of war. When I see the European rhetoric, especially Chancellor Merz, you know, I am getting afraid. So I support Prime Minister Babiš if he is able to say no to that. And especially Slovakian Prime Minister Fico made a very good point yesterday. So I agree with both of them.

#Glenn

I just have one more question on that, because I have some friends in the EU Parliament who make the point to me that many in the EU genuinely thought that they were winning the war against Russia, and now they're struck a bit by panic when it's perceived as not being the case anymore. Why do you think we have this rhetoric from people such as Merz?

#Václav Klaus

They are hopeless because if you look at the results of the elections in Germany yesterday again, so that in one of the parts of Germany, in the northern part, Pomerania and Mecklenburg, the party of

Mr. Merz, the leading party for decades in Germany, got in that part of Germany 5% of the vote. To be Merz, I would be afraid of making strong statements about that. So this strong rhetoric is usually a signal of the lack of support at home. And they try to change it by making strong speeches as regards international politics. And this is very dangerous, and I'm really afraid of that.

#Glenn

Yeah, I think the newest numbers that came in said 4.9%, so it's a complete collapse, while AfD came in first in Mecklenburg-Pomerania. Similar numbers—well, these were even worse than the numbers that came in from Saxony-Anhalt. But Merz says that he will remain steadfast and patient, which sounds like we're not going to change anything. But I wanted to ask, because that kind of links a bit to what you wrote in your article, just as a last question. That is, von der Leyen, she said that to protect ourselves from undemocratic forces, which are seemingly the people winning now the elections, we have to set up a center for democratic resilience. You have some history in the communist era. What does that mean?

#Václav Klaus

Such institutions are really crazy, artificial, and we know that it will not change anything. Madame von der Leyen suggested several such institutions. She mentioned that she wants to create the European Critical Raw Materials Corporation. It will solve the problem of the non-existence of deposits of such raw materials in Europe, on the European territory? To create a corporation, this is not a solution. This shows really the hopeless attempt to pretend that they are working and making some decisions. So, the same is the Center for Democratic Resilience. It's a joke. It's not a serious statement.

#Glenn

I know you have a very busy day ahead of you, so I appreciate you squeezing me in. Have a great day. Thank you.

#Václav Klaus

Thank you very much. Thank you.

#Václav Klaus

Goodbye.