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PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
AND HIS EXCELLENCY, MR VACLAV HAVEL, PRESIDENT OF THE
CZECH REPUBLIC, JOINT DOORSTOP, PARLIAMENT HOUSE,
CANBERRA, 28 MARCH 1995

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PM: Can I begin by saying how pleased I am to see His Excellency, the President, here in Australia. He does us a singular honour in coming. He's the first Head of State of the Republic to visit this country and, that is, way back through this century, and he, as I said, does us a singular honour. We've had the opportunity to speak today but I could not let this opportunity pass without paying tribute to the great moral courage that he has displayed in years past in his indignation at the denial of rights and liberties and his courage in fighting for them and speaking out, and now his role in trying to pilot with others the Czech Republic's future in the modern world. We salute you for your role in the past, and now, and we wish you well. Can I say also that I was very chuffed that the President stopped into Darwin and visited Kakadu and took an interest in Australia's oldest archaeology - the rock carvings and paintings of our indigenes. In saluting them, you salute us. That was very kind of you, and in that way, you have seen more of Australia than perhaps any other Head of State. We did have the opportunity to discuss economic and social policy matters, both within our countries and between our countries, and within Europe and between Europe and the Asia-Pacific, and I think it was a, for my part, a very useful exchange of views and I hope that the President enjoyed it also. I might now invite him to make some introductory comments.

VH: First of all, I thanked Prime Minister Keating for this opportunity for me to visit Australia and I expressed my gratitude for the warm welcome given to me and for the excellent organisation of my visit. During our talks I informed the Prime Minister of the situation in the Czech Republic. I mentioned our economic reform as well as the opportunities that we see for intensifying our co-operation with Australia. We also discussed the situation in the present day world and in that respect, we fully agree that in a world covered by one global civilisation, no isolation is imaginable any more. And just as the

APEC nations are interested in the developments in Europe, we for our part, take an interest in what is happening in this region. The Prime Minister has raised the subject of the European situation and we have discussed the European integration processes and the role that individual countries are playing in that, and he has expressed his hope and his support for the Czech Republic and other central European nations to be admitted soon into the family of European democracies. Let me also stress how profoundly I appreciate the multicultural dimension marking the Australian policy at present. As Prime Minister Keating explained to me, this dimension grows out of what I perceived as the most important thing - it grows out of respect for the human individual, for the individual human being and his human rights.

PM: Well, I think we might open briefly the questions because as you may know, the President and I have a luncheon appointment with other people which is really about now, so, maybe we should have just a short question period.

J: ... have you discussed also confirmation of Australia into a republic and possible role of President Havel ...

PM: No, I didn't, but I take the opportunity in your question to note that in His Excellency, he more than adequately represents his country as Head of State, and it's my great wish that an Australian person should also too represent their country as Head of State, and not the monarch of another country.

J: I noticed in a very short time you moved from being a ... intellectual for head of your country who has dedicated himself to giving the Government back to the people, how difficult has that task proved?

VH: It's true that unlike most of the best of politicians, I came to politics virtually overnight. I was just thrown into the river and had to start swimming. It was a tremendous, interesting experience.

PM: Maybe it's the best way.

J: ... (inaudible) eastern Europe.... Czech Republic?

PM: The economic links? Well, I think, I mean, your country has always had a deep democratic tradition - a latent, deep democratic tradition - that the best foundation stones for any bilateral relationship for this country. Secondly, in the past you have been a fully developed country. You are heading back to that status now. We've got a number of our major companies investing in the Czech Republic. I would like to see more but I think the Czech Republic's full membership, if you like, of the European Community will give it its best opportunity to not only trade with Australia and with Asia, but also with Europe. So, we regard it as a very obvious country for us to do

business with in eastern Europe and I think the investments we have on the ground now demonstrate that point.

J: ... (inaudible) ...

PM: Well, I think that he regards - he made the point himself - about the dignity of every human person, about the rights of people. He's indicated his interest in our older society - our indigenes. These are all common threads, I think, between the policies that this Government pursues and I know that in this country, some commentators would like the Government to keep its nose to the, sort of, mortgage grindstone, forgetting all of these great things that President Havel has himself stood for when it comes to the interests of people and the important interests of culture and identity. I think that might probably be the end of it, thank you. We would like to make this press conference longer than perhaps we are able to make it, but could I take this opportunity to thank the President most sincerely for participating and thank you, and no doubt he will see you tomorrow at the Press Club. Thank you.