

Statement by President Juncker on the 50th anniversary of the end of the Prague Spring

Today marks fifty years since the hopes and aspirations of the Prague Spring were crushed with force in one of the most tragic and bitter episodes in modern Europe's history. The tanks rolling in the streets of Prague on 21 August 1968 abruptly ended an attempt to introduce human rights and freedoms, cemented a regime that would last for another two decades and confirmed a brutal template for the suppression of dissent within the Warsaw Pact.

As we mark this anniversary, we remember the tragic loss of lives and we pay tribute to the courage and heroism of those – many of them students – who stood defiant in the face of tanks and weapons. Their legacy is our responsibility – we must never forget their attempt to defend the most basic of human rights and freedoms.

Fifty years on, Europe is no longer divided by an Iron Curtain and the people of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and other Europeans live in a Union of peace and solidarity that they can count on to protect them. But let us use this day of solemn commemoration to collectively remember that freedom and the respect for human rights can never be taken for granted and need to be fought for every single day. I can think of no better way of honouring the memory of the heroes of the Prague Spring.