

# Preface by President Vaclav Havel

Leader of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia

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I was thrust into top-level politics by the revolutionary events at the turn of the year 1989/1990 without any diplomatic training – “from the prison cell straight into the presidential palace” so to speak. At the same time, hundreds of my similarly unprepared fellow-citizens found themselves, like me, in high office or posts of influence. I often envied all those graduates of diplomatic schools with their command of several languages and international law, and their wealth of personal experience. During those first months, we were obliged to overcome any shortcomings in the introduction of democratic standards in our country by means of improvisation, dramatic invention and concepts based more on common sense than on hundreds of analyses and expert documents. I am still amazed that in those years it was possible to push through things in a single week that in conditions of stability would take several years to prepare and have approved. I also recall how many governments were taken unawares – as often before in history – by the lightning course events in countries, whose evolution and situations have been monitored for years by hundreds of diplomats and international observers, who had provided thousands of detailed reports. I cited those two examples simply to demonstrate that diplomacy cannot function properly without personal commitment and a strong determination to find solutions and attain objectives, it cannot simply rely on the recommendations or decisions of central machinery. I hope that this book will inspire all its readers to take a creative part in the propagation of civic freedoms and democratic standards throughout the world.

Vaclav Havel 