

## Remarks at the GLOBSEC Conference

October 26, 2021

President Vass; State Secretary Brocková; former Minister Demeš; Ambassador Káčer; Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Good morning! Dobré ráno!

It is a great honor for me to join you at this prestigious forum today. I would like to thank President Vass for organizing this event—the first of its kind in the Slovak Republic, and for the participation of many leaders and thinkers in the foreign policy arena of this great country. Your presence and support of this conference means a lot to me and to Taiwan, and it is also the best embodiment of solidarity - the key to today's topic: resilience and post pandemic economic recovery.

I am delighted to visit Slovakia again in my capacity as Foreign Minister. The world has undergone drastic change between now and my last time here in 2018. And I am truly happy that this time, I am offered more flexibility during my stay in Bratislava, including this precious opportunity to make a public speech at GLOBSEC. The shocking and catastrophic COVID-19 pandemic has certainly brought us closer as we reached out to help each other. But I think there's more to it. I

would say it's the increasingly solid bond and friendship between Slovakia and Taiwan that leads to more possibilities in our bilateral exchange.

### **Democratic Resilience**

Allow me to start with the story of Taiwan. The Nationalist government of the Republic of China relocated itself to Taiwan in 1949. For the past 72 years, the hard working 23.5 million people transformed the institution, economy and our ways of life, from poverty to prosperity, from authoritarianism to democracy, and from uniformity to diversity. But make no mistake, behind these outstanding achievements has been the cold reality of constant military threats and diplomatic isolation against Taiwan's survival and breathing space from across the Taiwan Strait.

We did not give up then, and we continue to fight for our freedom now. Taiwan has been standing firmly on the frontline for decades defending our democratic system, our liberty and our core values and beliefs. This is the first element of what I truly believe as the most fundamental essence of our resilience: our beloved, time-tested insistence of democracy.

As democratization took root in Taiwan, the same could be observed in the central and eastern part of the

European continent. The Velvet Revolution in 1989 showed the whole world that Slovaks and Czechs were equally eager to embrace democracy and freedom. And the world watched with admiration as the two peoples peacefully dissolved their country. Since then, both countries have become dynamic democracies. The stories of Taiwan and Czechoslovakia have both shown that democracy is best equipped with the resilience required for nations to transform and prosper peacefully.

### **Fighting COVID-19**

Fast-forward to 2019, the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic brought the world with yet another major challenge. The fatal pandemic was a real test to countries' public health system, economic strength, and commitment to good governance. Across the globe, medical systems were badly strained, and life in lockdown presented overwhelming physical and psychological stress, testing the resilience of both individuals and societies.

Taiwan was fortunate to have learnt from its 2003 SARS experience to quickly deploy effective and forward-looking control measures. With dedicated personnel and experts guarding on the front line, along with citizens voluntarily practicing anti-pandemic measures, number of confirmed cases and related death

stayed relatively low.

In trying times like this, it is paramount for friends to reach out to each other. Committed to being a force for good, Taiwan initiated the campaign of international humanitarian assistance early on, delivering surgical masks and medical supplies to those most in need, including our friends in Europe and Slovakia. And we are truly grateful that later, when prevention became the key to fighting the pandemic, Slovakia decided to donate 160 thousand vaccine doses to Taiwan. On behalf of the people of Taiwan, I want to say that we are all deeply touched seeing such virtuous cycle being established, and Taiwan will continue to contribute whatever we can, whenever we can.

Yet the fight against the pandemic is not over. Vaccine shipments are largely delayed when second and booster shots are essential to stopping the resurgence of pandemic. Hostile forces initiate aggressive disinformation campaign, attempting to divide us and weaken our democracy from within. Cooperation and solidarity remain the keys to combating the pandemic and addressing many shared problems.

### **Economic Resilience**

The pandemic has dragged down our economies, halting

the flow of both raw materials and finished goods. Manufacturing was disrupted by insufficient stockpile of key parts like car chips. There is no easy answer as to how to deal with these problems, but visioning and building a restructured democratic supply chain could be our first step.

I believe that through working together with trustworthy, like-minded partners who share the good faith in free and fair competition, transparency and market economy, our newly reorganized democratic supply chain would be more resilient than ever. Having reliable suppliers with shared faith in democracy and freedom will supercharge our economies. This is especially important when authoritarian regimes are weaponizing trade and orchestrating coercions against democracies.

My dear friends, I have no doubt that like-minded partners will jointly revitalize the economy in the post pandemic era, and countries with complimentary industries could not ask for a better time to work together. Consider the automotive industry, Slovakia's key sector. Taiwan is a critical provider of intermediate goods and auto parts. Our both sides have much to gain from enhanced cooperation on trade, investment, and industrial linkages. Our business community has also begun exploring opportunities in Slovakia in such fields

as smart machinery and green energy.

A few days ago, a Taiwanese trade and investment delegation visited Slovakia and the Czech Republic. They came to talk to their local counterparts about building interconnected and resilient supply chains for the democratic world. Several MOUs were signed between Taiwan and our two key partners in Central and Eastern Europe, and we are all very excited to see the bountiful opportunities of cooperation that span from science and technologies, the semiconductor industry, SME digitalization, to finance, tourism, and trade and investment.

### **Solidarity among Democracies**

Building post-pandemic resiliency also means strengthening our existing democratic institutions. Throughout the outbreak, authoritarian states have continued to discredit democratic governments through disinformation campaign, spreading rhetoric that democracy is an ineffective form of governance in face of major challenge like COVID. And back in Taiwan, we have noticed the alarming increase of military exercises, hybrid and cognitive warfare operations aiming to put our democracy under acute threat.

However, we are not afraid, and Taiwan is not alone. The

pursuit for freedom and democracy will bring like-minded countries together. We have Slovakia as our great friend, who is willing to strengthen our bilateral relations in various fields. The foreign committee of the National Council of Slovak for the first time passed a motion to support our participation in WHA in May this year. I have good faith that both Taiwan and Slovakia's democratic success stories could inspire many around the world, and I want to extend to you again my heartfelt gratitude for helping to make Taiwan's voice be heard on the international stage.

In September, we were delighted to have Slovakia cohost an online workshop under the Global Cooperation and Training Framework, or GCTF, a program created by Taiwan and the US to address global issues of mutual concern in conjunction with other like-minded partners. This event focused on labor issues, aiming to create guidelines for a post pandemic economic recovery. And I'm happy to mention that Slovakia will be cohosting another workshop in November—this time on fighting disinformation and hybrid warfare. In face of the increasingly complex challenge to cripple democracy, I am convinced that exchange and cooperation will help us identify the way forward.

And we appreciate that many of you have continued to

strengthen this special bond based on our shared values. We are friends and we are democracies. We support each other enthusiastically, we trade with each other freely, and we cooperate and contribute however we can wholeheartedly when the other is in need of assistance.

It gives me great delight to see that our bilateral relations has continued to go from strength to strength. Apart from the aforementioned areas, cooperation between Taiwan and Slovakia on education is also scoring new heights, cultivating future talents in such critical industries as electrical engineering, computer science, and green energy. Today, I am proud to announce to you the launch of the Taiwan Europe Connectivity Scholarship, which will be provided to Slovak students interested in pursuing degrees in fields related to critical industries.

Meanwhile, we are looking forward to receiving the Slovak vice-ministerial delegation in December. It is sure to break new ground in our bilateral relationship. We stand ready to work with you to bolster our partnership across the board in the years to come.

Dear friends, it is truly an honor to share the story of my country and vision for Taiwan and Slovakia to work even closer together in building a great post-pandemic world. Now more than ever before, forces for good must stand

as one and draw a line in the sand. Liberty will not be sacrificed. Freedom will not be surrendered. And democracy will not be defeated.

Thank you! *Ďakujem!*