Statement by the Chairperson-in-Office

H.E. Miroslav Lajčák

Reception on the margins of the OSCE Asian Conference hosted by Italy

Tokyo, Japan

2 September 2019

State Minister Toshiko Abe,

Foreign Minister Taro Kono,

Ambassadors Azzoni and Starace,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Konbanwa,

Thank you for your warm welcome and once again thank you to Japan and Italy for your hospitality.

As some of you may know, Japan has a very special place in my heart.

25 years ago – Tokyo was my first ambassadorial posting and I had the honor to spent four exciting years here.

Japan informed my worldview in so many amazing ways.

I had the chance to experience the unique blend of ancient and modern, so characteristic to your wonderful country.

I remember, when I first came here as a young ambassador, my Turkish colleague told me:

 "you may leave Japan, but Japan never leaves you".

I didn´t exactly understand what he meant back then. I do today.

It may be 21 years since I finished my diplomatic mission here, but Japan never left me.

I continued to follow developments and as a Foreign Minister always made sure we cultivated our mutual relations.

I am very proud of the friendship between Japan and Slovakia, and very thankful for the commitment to multilateralism Japan demonstrates at various forums, including the OCSE Asia Contact Group.

Japan has become an OSCE partner in 1992 – so even before Slovakia was born in 93, and before we even started building our bilateral relations.

We quickly became close allies, even though for us in Central Europe, Japan may sometimes feel quite distant.

Looking at a map would make you believe it´s the edge of the world.

But when I came here, I realized 3 things.

First, that in fact, Japan is the center of things.

Not only for its economic power or political influence.

Most of all, because of its people.

We admire the strength and resilience of Japanese people, the cultural richness and spirit of rebuilding, which enriches our planet as a whole.

Also – and as a diplomat I was always grateful for this – their incredible reverence extended to partners.

I admired the value Japanese people ascribe to time.

To your own time, as well to the time of your partner.

Japan thought me more prudence and awareness – merits I try to carry with myself both in work and outside of it.

Second, I realized that perspective is subjective.

When I came to Japan and looked at the maps here, I realized they portrayed the world differently.

With Japan at the center, and Europe somewhere on the edge of the world.

In international affairs, we can sometimes look at the same situation, same concern, even the same globe – and view differently where we stand.

But though we need to be clear-eyed about our differences – they can be overcome when we inject enough respect.

Japan showed me that no matter the outlook, no matter where you are on the map – when we respect each other - we can overcome the subjectivity of perspective.

And in Japan, respect was always a baseline of all our interactions,

And third, I realized that distance is relative.

While the maps could make Europe and Japan feel remote, this distance is virtual.

Not only thanks to advantages brought about by the age of digitalization – instant connection via Internet or ever more accessible air travel.

But also thanks to cooperation. Partnerships. Multilateral platforms. Thanks to gatherings like this.

The distance dissolves when we all meet in one room to respectfully discuss how to bring our countries, our regions and our planet on a path towards a safer future.

And though this journey may sometimes seem a million miles long, it is fully within our power to choose our next step and speed up the pace.

As they say: SENRI NO MIČI MO IPPO KARA - a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

And the best way to take that step is together, building a partnership that grows strong, fair, just and smart.

And if we achieve that together, we will have lived up to our responsibilities for future generations.

Thank you