

**REMARKS BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC,**

**AT THE OPENING OF AN EXHIBITION COMMEMORATING THE
30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VELVET REVOLUTION**

*11 November 2019
Brussels, Berlaymont*

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

I am very glad to be here with you tonight and bring this wonderful exhibition to the European capital.

It has already been 30 years, since our region reclaimed values of freedom, democracy and human dignity.

Students, artists, union workers ... the unified call from squares, cities and the country overcame oppression with the force of non-violent protest and a simple demand for *slobodné voľby* – free elections.

People poured into the streets of Bratislava and Prague in hope for a free and better life.

One of the main desires of the Velvet Revolution was our “return to Europe”.

Sense of belonging to a community that cherishes democratic values, protects rights and improves lives of its people.

We have come a long way since those November events, and the difficult road took a major turn in the right direction 15 years later, when the European Union opened its doors to us.

And so the walls and borders which started falling down in 1989 were removed completely.

30 years later, Slovakia and Czech Republic remain the closest allies and partners, sharing not only common past, but a common vision for the future.

And today, we are very proud to jointly introduce this exhibition.

I believe that even after 30 years, Velvet Revolution can still inspire all of us in many of its features:

1/ First, in its non-violent nature.

In a world tormented by conflicts and civil unrests – our Velvet story proves that democracy can be won without arms. And that applies anywhere around the globe.

2/ Second, in the way it unified a nation.

In Czechoslovakia - the primary call for freedom by a handful was quickly followed by hundreds of thousands of citizens. And together, they won over lethargy and oppression.

In a world with growing divisions within our societies, polarization and hate – our Velvet story *reminds* us the lengths we can go when we unite and work for a common good.

3/ Third, in the way Europe inspires freedom.

The Velvet Revolution launched the process of healing, development and transformation of our society.

Inspired by free Europe, our citizens collapsed the communist regime and in 30 years, pulled the country from a black hole (as we were once called) to the heart of the EU.

So our Velvet story reminds us of the European power to inspire, to set an example.

Vision of Europe made people run to those squares.

And Europe listened to their call.

Let's remember that, before we shut our ears to calls coming again.

Maybe from a bit further east, but Europe nonetheless.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

I know that all of you heard about the events in Czechoslovakia on November 17, 1989.

But sometimes, it's good to remind and inform not just through historical dates, numbers and telling.

But also through image.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words.

These pictures capture the emotion, story and hope of the democratic wave of 1989.

Please, take your time to explore it and let it inspire.

Thank you