

CLOSING ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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at the flagship conference of the Atlantic Council and GLOBSEC on

THE UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL EUROPE:

**CELEBRATING EUROPE WHOLE AND FREE, BUILDING THE NEXT CENTURY
TOGETHER**

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Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

it is truly great to be with you tonight and thanks to Atlantic Council and GLOBSEC for bringing us together.

I am sorry I could not join earlier, in fact I have just jumped off a train from New York a few minutes ago as I was attending events at the United Nations General Assembly.

It is incredibly important to bring Central Europe to Washington and speak about the transatlantic bond – and it is more than symbolic to do so in 2019.

Slovakia will commemorate the Velvet Revolution of 1989 just in the few months – marking exactly 30 years since our region found freedom and renewed lasting friendship with the United States.

But let me recall the very first such anniversary – 17 November 1990.

On that day, President George Bush Sr. and First Lady Barbara came to Czechoslovakia to celebrate freedom with Czechs and Slovaks.

In his speech to cheering crowds, President Bush recalled that when the US Declaration of independence was first read in public in 1776, a bell tolled to proclaim the thrill of that moment.

President then donated the copy of the Liberty Bell to the people of Czechoslovakia and rang it three times:

once for the **courage** ... once for the **freedom** ... and once for the **children**.

A truly great moment in the history of the friendship between the United States and Central Europe.

In those early 90's, President Bush used to speak a lot about a “new world order”.

Order based on rules and cooperation among freedom loving nations.

He spoke of the world where, in his words: “the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle”.

The Transatlantic relationship was, and remains, central in shaping such international order.

It is however becoming more and more clear, that these aspirations would not fully materialize.

The rules we have created have been bent.

One of the panels here this afternoon addressed the potential for transatlantic cooperation in the era of great power competition.

Very accurate title, as that is exactly where we seemed to be headed.

From the golden age of multilateral institutions, international law and the values of transatlantic bond transcending the power relations – we are once again moving to the era of multipolarity.

All while relationships between the most important powers are filled with mistrust, many medium-sized powers are asking for a bigger say in global politics, and this is all taking place in an era of unprecedented technology and information progress.

Keeping the old status quo is not an option anymore. This is a new game, with new rules.

So, where is the transatlantic relationship in all of this?

Well, I think that in this competition, the strength of the Transatlantic bond will determine whether the western civilization will be the major player - or a playing field.

We need to do our best to renew this bond.

Because I don't think we want to imagine the order, where the words of President Bush would play in reverse, where the rule of the jungle would supplant the rule of law.

So, I would say, tonight – let's revisit the idea of President Bush from November 17 1990 and once again ring the bell three times.

This time, I would propose:

once for our **unity** ... because it takes courage to go together;

once for our **values** ... because they are the bedrock of freedom;

and once for our **world** ... because it already belongs to our children.

So first – for our unity.

In this new setting, both sides of the Atlantic are looking to better their stance on the chessboard.

There is a lot of talk in Europe on the strategic autonomy, and there is a lot of talk in the US on foreign policy of national interest.

With significant changes in US foreign policy doctrine, the administration is working to ensure that the future of international agreements unambiguously advances American interest (that's a quote of Secretary Pompeo).

But here, I would argue that it is a vital American interest to see European Union succeed – and vice versa.

Our own national interests are better served when we keep the Transatlantic bond strong.

Generations of American leaders understood that US benefited from having a strong partner in the EU.

That's why the United States has always been the greatest ally and supporter of the European integration.

Because it made sense. It still does:

Together, we form western civilization holding dear principles of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Together, we form the largest and most integrated economic, trade and investment relationship in the world.

Together, we share the same global interests in world affairs.

And I am saying this without downplaying the depth of our current disagreements.

We believe that some actions taken with regard to the MEPP or JCPOA do not serve our collective interest.

We believe that trade does not need to be a zero-sum game and we can all enjoy economic growth by inventing and creating value.

And we are worried to see this great country step back from international institutions and view multilateral structures as an obstacle to American interest - rather than a tool to advance interests of us all, including America.

But despite these differences, we are still pursuing so much together.

We share the interest to see peace and reconciliation in the Balkans, Syria, Korean peninsula and list goes on.

We want to see the crises in and around Ukraine resolved.

We want to see this world free of terrorism.

And of course, we continue to work together in NATO – going strong and welcoming new members in.

US has increased presence in Europe over the last years; North America with Europe are doing more together, with more partners, in more places than ever before.

That of course includes increase in our defense spending.

So as opposed to those days in 1990 – Europe today is bigger, stronger and much more reliable partner – considerably thanks to the help of the United States.

And we should be even more – take even greater responsibility for our own security and defense.

I understand that the talk of strategic autonomy irritates some.

But for me, this means seeing EU stand its ground in this new power competition.

EU ready to stand up - along the United States and under the umbrella of NATO - to defend and project our values.

For me it means being the mature stakeholder we have the potential to be.

Because if we do not stand as a player in this game, the only other alternative is to be reduced to a plaything.

So going forward I would use the same argument - in this complicated multipolar competition, even the biggest powers will need friends.

Strong friends.

Strong Europe is the best way to advance America's own interest.

There is no friendship more natural.

Because we are not just a community of interests, but also a community of values.

So the second bell tolls for our values.

On that autumn day in Prague 1990, President Bush said that Czechoslovakia, as the lonely victim of appeasement a century ago, would now be the first to understand that: “there is right and there is wrong, there is good and there is evil, and there are sacrifices worth making.”

Standing up for the good, sacrificing for the right turns in history – that made America the extraordinary place it is.

And right now, we seem to be at one of history's critical junctures.

As we are headed to the multipolar world, it becomes all the more clear that these values are own to us, but are not shared by all.

Now, we cannot step back from them or compromise them.

As the United States are finding new pride in America's interests, I would argue that our interests and our values can only go hand in hand.

We have an interest in promoting our values.

One of our strongest tools to inspire societies has always been the example of our values. Our ability to lead by example.

They are the bedrock we need to protect, and we are especially reminded of that on the 30th anniversary of the fall of Berlin wall.

We are again reminded that democracy is never finished and we need to cultivate it constantly.

By supporting civil society, protecting minorities and doing responsible politics so that our people do not feel compelled by voices of populists and extremists.

That's how we can keep our transatlantic family strong.

And while a strong family is fundamental for any of its members to feel secure at home, it is smart to keep friendly relations with neighbors.

That's why our predecessors created the multilateral institutions.

Because the world is bigger than the Atlantic.

So the third bell tolls for our world.

I know the institutions are not working perfectly. And having spent the past 2 years as the President of the UN General Assembly and as the OSCE Chair – trust me, I know that.

But that's the feature of their design.

They absorb heavy pressures stemming from different, often opposing, interests.

But better to have these pressures absorbed within those organizations, than erupting outside.

And so, as in Europe we see renewed focus on national states versus integration, in the US we see tendency to focus on national interest versus multilateralism - let's be fair and acknowledge the vast amount of good work these organizations are daily producing.

I can't tell you how impressed I was when I saw firsthand the OSCE monitors in Ukraine, or the UN peacekeepers in distant corners of our planet.

These institutions are a legacy of generations of Americans and Europeans working side by side to establish a multilateral order.

President Woodrow Wilson championed the first universal international organization.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt was there at the establishment of the United Nations.

The World's modern economic system was born in Bretton Woods and the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in this very city.

And I truly believe that multilateralism continues to be the best tool to advance global peace and security.

Which, you will agree with me, are in the American interest as well.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

On the 30th anniversary of democracy in Central Europe, we must remember that the friendship between Europe and the US needs a constant investment.

Not just in political or economic terms – but also through research, dialogue and people-to-people contacts.

And that starts at the places like this - the work of the Atlantic Council and GLOBSEC is extremely vital for nurturing, cultivating (sometimes maybe even healing) the transatlantic bond.

So I am very grateful for creating this space and possibility to meet.

I have one last pleasant opportunity before I conclude – and that is to invite you all to the reception co-hosted by the Embassy of the Slovak Republic.

So please, enjoy the reception and the rest of your evening.

Thank you