

State Secretary Korčok

Vice-President Hudák

Distinguished guests,

- What's next for the EU's further integration?! We have all **faced this question at some point**, haven't we?!. And therefore, it **may not sound entirely new**.
- But the context – **the context is new**. And I am convinced that **we are having the right discussion at the right time**.

- Europe is **at a crossroads again**.
- Not long ago, **the EU was in full-on crisis mode** – we had to cope with the financial and **economic** crisis, the **migration** challenges, a string of **terror** attacks on our soil, and with a decision of one of our Member States to **leave the family**.
- No wonder that **during those rainy days, people have lost a sense of stability**, security and predictability.

- However, things are **getting better**. Well – **yes and no**.

- On one hand, we are **finally enjoying positive economic news**.
 - **Growth** in the EU has outstripped that of the United States over the last two years and it now stands above 2% for the union as a whole.

 - **Unemployment** is at a nine year low. With 235 million **people at work**, we are experiencing record-high employment in the EU.

- But these **figures** – however good they may be – **do not paint a full picture**. I'm referring to **the mood** of our citizens that **does not necessarily reflect better trends**.
 - The national elections of this year alone have seen **dissatisfaction, resentment, and even anger** expressed by significant portions of our populations. Time after time **we hold our breath until the final results** – to see nationalist, Eurosceptic and even extreme parties often harvesting votes out of this frustration.

 - **Radical ideas** that we thought were long gone, are suddenly **back at the centre-stage**.

- Among other things, these voices **attempt to undermine the European spirit of cooperation** – with sham arguments and destabilising solutions.
- Some put **blame on technology and the way social media can twist political discourse** – sometimes it is even with interference of external actors.
- Others point at **the growing social gap** in our societies or the **need to reform certain political institutions**.
- But whatever the reason, there is a **clear sense of urgency to act**.
- Let's be clear, **the burden of proof rests on our shoulders**. It is **up to us** – all of us in this room and outside this room **who share my European conviction** – to join and **inspire for Europe**.
- **No need for any additional reason or additional wake-up call**.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is **in this context** that the EU's future integration is being discussed.
- The **start button** was pressed at the **Bratislava Summit** a little over a year ago – in the wake of the UK referendum.
- Since then, the **discussion has been evolving and maturing**, also thanks to a **number of momentous contributions**, such as:
 - The European Commission's **White Paper** on the Future of Europe;
 - The **Rome Declaration**;
 - President Juncker's **State of the Union** speech;
 - The speech on Europe by French President **Macron**;
 - And most recently, **the Leaders' Agenda** presented by the European Council President Tusk and endorsed by all EU27 leaders.
- Of course, I shall not overlook a **re-energized Franco-German engine**.

- Yes, these contributions **vary here and there**, but **three things are coming through loud and clear** now:
 1. **The unity** is rightly seen as the **EU's strongest currency**;
 2. There is an appetite to move into **higher gear in certain areas**;
 3. We must **reconnect with people through tangible results** that only EU cooperation can bring.
- Let me **explain**.

- **Whatever the matter** at hand, we should **tackle it with a European spirit**. And the European spirit means **all Member States at the table**.
- This should remain **our starting point** as well as **our primary ambition**.
- After all, the **EU is known for its ability to master the art of compromise** or figuratively speaking, **to square the circle** – there are even numerous jokes about it 😊

- **Even on the most difficult files**, we have seen **the power of finding common ground** – posted workers just earlier this week.
- And we see **unity at its best** during our negotiations **with the United Kingdom**.
- But don't get me wrong! It **does not mean that the EU should move at the pace of its slowest member**.
- In recent words of Donald Tusk, unity **cannot be an excuse for stagnation**.

- **Certain topics are burning**. And there is an **appetite – resolve even – to get into higher gear** in several areas.
- Faced with a changing environment, **internal security and defence** are definitely one of them.
 - The EU is set to **deepen defence cooperation** of those Member States capable and willing to do so. In fact, a first major result is **already within reach** – the so-called **PESCO**, Permanent Structured Cooperation, is **likely to be launched**

by the end of this year. This will open **the door to joint security projects** of participating Member States.

- Sooner or later, we **will need a giant leap** in the joint fight against **terrorism** and **cybercrime** because they do not know borders.
- Take for instance, President **Juncker's idea of a European intelligence unit** to combat foreign fighters and cross-border terrorism. Far too long, we keep repeating that better intelligence-sharing is a must.
- And **cyber security** – it is **simply vital** for our private lives, commercial activities and our political systems, our democracies.
- **Another area that will see further integration** is, no doubt, **the Eurozone**. A special summit is envisaged this December.
 - The **2008 crisis exposed** without mercy the **weaknesses** in the euro area's architecture.
 - A **full completion of the Banking Union is a must**. But it will **hardly stop there**.

- For instance, we may see a **birth certificate of the European Monetary Fund** in the near future.
- Academics and policy-makers **already debate a fiscal union** with some form of fiscal capacity to weather macroeconomic shocks. Although it is **clear this will not happen overnight**.
- In my view, **the Eurozone reform** – however intensive in political terms – should be **bold in vision** and extremely **well-thought in concrete steps**.
- We need to **get it right** this time.
- I could list **more areas linked with a new or renewed push** for further integration, for instance **the European Public Prosecutor** or **the social pillar**.
- But **last example** I'd like to dwell on is **trade**.
 - Due to a **shift in the United States**, the **EU** is boosting its position of **an advocate of free and fair trade** – **we can really profit** from this newly-created vacuum.
 - **Building on a recent success story** of the EU-Canada deal, there are **good prospects** of an

agreement with Japan, Mercosur, and eventually with Australia or New Zealand.

- But I **underscore the word “fair”** in the phrase free and fair and **the word “reciprocity”**. The EU’s trade **deals must be stronger here**.
- While open for business, **we have to get what we give**. Because trade is also about jobs.

- These are exactly the kind of tangible results that we need in order **to reconnect with citizens**.
- We **may not have hearts and minds** of everyone at the moment, but we **cannot abandon** our beliefs, **harden** our rhetoric and **put** Europe in the back seat.
- On the contrary, we **must equip ourselves with even greater patience and vigour** – and **engage**.
- **What** do I mean?!
 - **Encouraging critical thinking** – because myths or false information are part of the problem. A few years ago, a claim that the Earth is flat would cause ironic laughter 😊 Today, the Google offers me some 400-thousand results on the phrase flat-

Earthers who spread their arguments better thanks to the internet and social media.

- **Creating a personal link** between respective EU policies and people – because this is often missing.

- Let me give you **one example where I think it's already working – the Energy Union** where I'm fortunate enough to lead the European integration.
- The **Energy Union** has brought under one roof our efforts **to provide Europeans with energy** which is secure, competitive, and sustainable.
 - **Secure** – because in 2009, we learned what it means losing the gas supply overnight. We cannot and will not live under such risk anymore.
 - **Competitive** – because it needs to make business sense and help modernise the European economy.
 - **Sustainable** – because natural disasters are no longer images from distant places. They also occur here in Europe, close to our homes.

- During my Energy Union Tours across Europe, I often meet with **the public** and it makes me **happy to see their support** – for the energy transition into a clean economy and in particular, for our climate action.
- You can **hardly be a nationalist to build energy security** or to **fight climate change**. Because it is **bigger than one Member State**, bigger than one generation.
- I truly **enjoy talking to people** about the European cooperation **from various angles of the Energy Union**.
- And I also **find myself inspired** when I get to **touch the future** in this area – full of innovations, full of opportunities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Allow me to **finish on a personal and optimistic note**. Those who know me well can confirm that I **tend to zoom in on the positive** 😊
- **When** my colleagues and I **strived for Slovakia to join the EU**, Schengen, and the Eurozone, I did it

because I strongly believed in the **vision of the EU as transformational power**.

- And although our country is **no longer a new kid on the block**, but a well-established member, I feel **similar** – if not the same – **enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility**.
- **In the debate** about the EU's further integration, **Slovakia has chosen to be at its heart** – highest political figures of this country confirmed it earlier this week. It is **good for Slovakia** and for **the region**.

- All in all, it is my strongest belief that **we will jointly write many more chapters in the book on the EU's integration**.
- It is **not a matter of whether**, but a **matter of how**.
- At times, it may **not be full-steam integration with giant leaps**. But it is **also the direction** that matters.
- In words of President Juncker, even if we do **not go at the same speed**, what is important is that we all **go in the same direction**.

- So as I said at the very beginning, this **discussion is the right one and at the right moment.**
- And I am sure that the **Tatra Summit will**, as always, also **generate, provide valuable contributions.**
- Thank you very much for your attention.