

*Remarks by the President of Slovakia Zuzana Čaputová delivered at the online  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honor to open the Atlantic Council's Future Forum. This conference will discuss the future of the most important relationship Europe and the United States have – the transatlantic bond, that has kept us together and strong for more than 70 years.

In his recent address to Congress, President Biden proclaimed, that America is back. The president also said, that the US will work with its partners and allies to make sure it will stay.

In Europe, this is very good to hear. And, even more importantly, this is very good to see. In concrete actions the US administration has already taken, such as re-joining the Paris Climate Agreement, or a restart of an EU-US dialogue on China. We see renewed commitment to multilateralism, to diplomacy and to protection of democratic values.

Today, I want to talk about how we can build on this great start, and how we can work together, Europe and America, to address some of the biggest challenges ahead of us. We can only do so, if we work together and if we are resilient.

Resilience means that our economies prosper and our societies are healthy. It implies the ability to defend our values and our citizens from malign actors, internal and external. In short, resilience means that the rule of law and the rules-based order are respected, both at home and abroad.

The most pressing and immediate challenge to our resilience, is the pandemic. We need to kick-start our economic recovery. Because we cannot be strong globally, if we are weak at home.

Our recovery plans cannot be the copy-paste of the previous ones. We must recognize, that while our economic model has made us richer, than the rest of the world, it has also produced deep economic imbalances, including at home.

A recent survey suggests that around the world, people see economic inequality as the number one threat to democracy. Any economic recovery that ignores this fact will not prevent the next crisis – it will accelerate it.

The decision of both, Europe and America to use billions to build new infrastructure and help our people develop skills needed for the 21st century, is the right one – because it will make us stronger. We need to remove the remaining trade barriers, not build new ones. The best answer to China's economic and technological assertiveness, we can give is, if the two of us work together, not compete with each other.

The second challenge is the climate crisis. Our economic growth has degraded our planet and we must reverse this trend. The recovery must be green and sustainable. By 2050, Europe will become the first climate-neutral continent. It is not a declaration – it is a plan that will soon become legally binding for all EU states. I am glad that in President Biden's administration, we have the strongest possible partner in this effort.

Still, the US and Europe alone, will not solve the climate crisis – we urgently need to get the rest of the world on board and lead the global effort by adopting ambitious, fair and inclusive environmental standards for our trade and our industries.

The third area where Transatlantic Allies need to act in unison and increase our resilience is digital. In Europe the GDP of 12 out of 27 member states – including that of my own country, Slovakia – is smaller, than the annual revenues of some of the biggest tech and digital companies. And that is fine - as long as this economic might is not abused. As long as it does not create monopolies. As long as it does not undermine our democracies through propaganda and disinformation or exposes our vulnerabilities to foreign adversaries. The storming of the US Capitol has shown, that fear and hatred, even when disseminated virtually, still have very real consequences.

Inaction is no longer an option. Let's work together on common rules that foster competition but also transparency and accountability in the digital space. The rule of law must be applicable online, not just offline. The sooner we find a common solution, the better for our freedom and democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I spoke about some of the global challenges the US and Europe can successfully address if they work together. Let me briefly turn to Europe.

That the US is determined to stay is excellent news for our transatlantic partnership. Because it sends a powerful signal that America and Europe will work together to protect the values we share and our joint security.

I wish I could say, that the agenda of making Europe whole and free has been delivered. But it has not. The continent has not been immune to populism or polarization that seek to divide us, rather than unite us. Democracies of Central and Eastern Europe feel these pressures too – from attempts to undermine public trust in our democratic systems through to disinformation, to questioning the rule of law, or our values.

Both the US and Europe have to address these challenges – at home and abroad. Slovakia understands this. And we act accordingly.

To root out corruption and strengthen our democracy, we are carrying out comprehensive judiciary and rule of law reforms. Because in the end, what binds us together, as partners and allies, are our democratic values and the determination to protect them. Slovakia welcomes the US plan to convene a Summit of Democracies to advance democratic renewal.

We are taking steps to improve resilience. Our defense budget has grown by more than 120% since 2014. Virtually all of the new money goes to the modernization of our military. Our critical infrastructure and 5G network will stay strong and open – for our partners, but not for our adversaries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If the message of President Biden is that the US is back, my message is that we are ready.

Let's work together: there is plenty of work ahead of us.

Thank you.