Dear guests, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to address this Forum. Especially as it celebrates
its 25th edition. My congratulations and appreciation to the organizing board and the entire team – thanks to you, this is not just a conference
but very often a meeting of like-minded partners and friends.

I wish I could be with you in Prague today – I always keep the city
in my heart and I cherish returning there. Of course, this Forum has also
a special bond to President Václav Havel's legacy.

His words that *truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred* ring as true today as when he said them more than 30 years ago.

Because they capture well the task for our generation of political leaders – to seek truth and to oppose lies and hatred, which sometimes seems
to overwhelm our public debate. We have to protect and sustain liberal democracy – the only type of democracy there is.

This is not always a fair fight. The truth is limited by facts, reason,
and science while those using lies and half-truths do not seem
to be bothered by them. Their only mission is to plant a seed of doubt
and fragmentize.

The global pandemic has exposed the fragility of our democracies
when political shortcuts and populism are masked as solutions. This has made many of us doubt whether we can prevail over lies and hatred relying
on Havel’s *truth* and *love* alone. I am sure we can.

But the truth will only beat a lie if is communicated with empathy.
Our uneven vaccination effort is a good example. We try to defy
the loudest anti-vaxxers but we should pay more attention to a much bigger group of those who just have fear. A fear that cannot be addressed only through hard data and facts. Fear is overcome if one feels they are safe –
not when they are told to feel safe.

So, we need to reach out much more to those who feel fear and choose
not just the right data but also the right form and tone – the one filled
with respect and empathy. If we don't do so, we will see that what begins
as silent fear can easily turn into loud and hardly manageable anger.

Likewise, love will only prevail over hatred, if we operate within a legal framework where the rule of law principles are followed. Today, the most pressing challenge in this regard is the increasing role of social media
in our lives. Because they often apply hatred and reinforce the dividing lines across our societies.

I am sure that undermining democracy was never among these platforms' objectives. But this is the reality we are facing. We must address it through fair and effective regulation. Because our rights end where someone else's rights begin. This should be equally true in our online and offline worlds.

*Truth* and *love* will not prevail over hatred unless we start re-shaping
our social, economic, and legislative environment in which our liberal democracies can grow even stronger.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude with a fitting quote from another great
'Czech-o-Slovak' personality – Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk – *If our democracy
has its faults, then we must overcome these faults, not overcome democracy.*

Thank you. *Děkuji.*