

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

It is my great pleasure and honour to welcome all of you here, on the occasion of the 102<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the establishment of our independent state – former Czechoslovakia. On the eve of the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1918, an agreement was reached and the Czechs together with the Slovaks achieved their dream of a united and independent state. At the end of 1992, this joint state was peacefully divided into two countries, and the Czech Republic has started its new history.

Within the past of 102 years, the Czech State had to deal with various complex circumstances, situations and challenges. Today, we are proud to be an independent country, which is a member of the European Union that allows us to benefit from both the European unity and the European single market.

We can only be successful if we ourselves are sound, healthy, and prosperous. It was a very difficult decision for me whether YES or NOT I should proceed in organizing today's event in a difficult period when the second wave of the COVID-19 epidemics is tormenting the Czech nation back at home. I am afraid that our spring success made us less humble and alerted, and it has resulted into a situation with some unexpected spin. Since we can, however, enjoy brittle but convincing safety here in Beijing due to the resolute and systemic anti-epidemic actions by the Chinese authorities in recent months, I would like to use this opportunity to raise the flag of my country and do what can help the most in current situation:

**I would like to pay tribute to those who fight the pandemics in front lines, and I also would like to thank whole international community for their joint support and cooperation in this Covid-19 fight. All of us would agree that when tough times come, you know who your true friends really are.**

I am here to keep explaining our reality and views to our international partners, and to support the spirit and promote endeavours of the Czech community and the Czech companies in China. There should be no doubt that **success of Czech business abroad helps to overbridge potential hardship of our economy back home**. And we are here not only to look back to history, but mainly to think of our common future.

I am glad I can therefore invite our Chinese guests and other international partners tonight to share with them our national pride and introduce them the Czech flagship companies on the Chinese market.

Dear guests, let me start with the one of the oldest Czech treasures we have. The foundation and development of our country is connected with the unique personal stories of many talented people. Only thanks to them the pre-war Czechoslovakia was one of the world's most industrialized countries. This certainly includes two gentlemen who founded an industrial

enterprise, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year. The company has grown into one of the largest Czech companies and has been worldwide known under the name of ŠKODA. The cars made by ŠKODA have been available in China since the year 1935 and it was the first official vehicle of the leader of newly established People's Republic of China after 1949. Today's evening you can follow their history and development on the brief exhibition displayed in front of this Great Hall.

Pre-war Czechoslovakia was also flourishing thanks to the financial experts, who laid the foundations of a new currency of the newly founded state. The century-old history of the Czech currency is marked by an exhibition in the foyer and it describes the banknotes and coins issued by the Czech National Bank over time. The very fact that the Czech koruna has already celebrated 100 years since its establishment is remarkable. It is the only currency in all the successor states of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire to still bear the name koruna (meaning crown). The organization of this unique poster exhibition would not be possible without the support of the Czech flagship companies as Home Credit, Státní tiskárna cenin, Česká mincovna, Škoda, AlpinePro, Lasvit, Preciosa, and Tescoma.

Ladies and gentlemen, a very important part of the Czech identity, our history, which we have the honour to commemorate in such a great company today, is the Czech national cuisine. In a moment you will be invited to taste selected delicatessen prepared by the chef of our embassy. And I'm very happy that the culinary team of the hotel St. Regis, in cooperation with our chef, will promote Czech cuisine and Czech beer, for the next several days as St Regis Hotel is hosting Week of Czech Cuisine starting tomorrow.

Thank you for coming and have a nice inspiring evening!