

Honorable President of the National Council, Honorable Deputies, Representatives of the Slovenian Government, Excellences, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, All Protocol observed,

It is great to hold again, after 2 years a celebration like this one, especially when I had to twice cancel a prepared event, one with Czech military honor guard and one with Czech police honor guard.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 is sooner than expected again on the rise, so I decided to modify little bit the final part of today's event – the glass of wine will happen, but without the snacks. Nevertheless you are after the concert cordially invited to test some Czech wines.

The world is far from a safe one. There are plenty of smaller or bigger conflicts all over the world. We are working in the country which itself had to face a war for independence more than 3 decades ago. And for the first time in several decades we are experiencing a direct war on the European soil, better to say a Russian bloody aggression against Ukraine. We stand with Ukraine.

Of course, I am not forgetting what preceded the nowadays situation eg Ossetia, Crimea – simply Russia as a former colonial power wants to control and even take back as many territories, which were under the reign of its Empire and later USSR, as possible. Regardless of the international law and the common sense.

However, for the first time and not only the EU and NATO countries, but also plenty of other countries, have been able to unite in a fast reaction. Not only words, not weak sanctions as a result of long discussions and hesitations, but a swift reaction. Of course, more could be always done, but already what we did in response to the Russian aggression (and that is a polite word) and to help Ukraine to face the invaders, proved us united, strong and committed. I sincerely hope, that all the countries will continue in this path and very soon we will be able to start with a massive recovery assistance to Ukraine – which is one of the CZ EU PRES priorities, if the circumstances allow.

Today we are commemorating an important event in the Czechoslovak and now Czech history – The Czech Armed Forces Day. Nevertheless today occasion has a very special cherry on the cake, which is happening for the second time after we joined the EU family and will repeat roughly each 13 to 16 years or even longer, depending on the enlargement procedures in WB and Eastern Partnership countries. Yes, for the second time we are taking over the EU Presidency from France and this is partly the reason, why you

can see also French soldiers/marines around. My gratitude goes to my dear colleague, Amb. Florence Ferrari, her military attaché Colonel Valérie Trameau-Chabert and to all others on the French side who have been involved in the decision making and to all of you who are participating in the event.

The second and the main reason why we have French participation is - The Czech Armed Forces Day commemorates the military parade which was held in the French city of Darney on 30th June, 1918. On that day, the 21st Czechoslovak Rifle Regiment, numbering six thousand, swore an oath of allegiance to the (future) Czechoslovak Republic, before departing for the battle. The ceremony was attended by the French President, Raymond Poincaré, members of the French cabinet, future Czechoslovak Foreign Minister and later President, Eduard Beneš, representatives of the allied armies, and a delegation of the City of Paris.

The event signified the diplomatic recognition of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces by France already before the formation of Czechoslovakia, which would subsequently take place in October later that year. The French government for the first time in the history also publicly declared, that it is recognizing the right of Czechs and Slovaks (at that time Czechoslovaks) to create their own state.

It was an important gesture, which the Czech Republic did not forget and is remembered every year since 2002. Up till 1926 the French army officers played an important role in formation of the Czechoslovak army, however the cooperation continued up till the sad events in 1938, which culminated in the Munich agreement, or better to say, Munich betrayal.

The Velvet revolution in 1989, after long years of Nazi occupation 1939-1945 and long period from 1948 till 1989 of Soviet influence, oppression and occupation of Czechoslovakia by the forces of Warsaw pact led by USSR in 1968, brought a new chapter in the history of the Czechoslovak army and from 1993 the Czech Army. We joined NATO in 1999 and from the year 2005 the Army became fully professionalized. It is also interested to note, that till now during the history of the existence of the General staff, there had been 2 French Chief of Staffs and more than 20 Czechs and Slovaks.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me please to thank the Czech Army and my staff for the effort done to be able to hold this event. My special thanks goes to the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic, Mrs. Černochová, to the Chief of staff Mr. Opata, also to Mrs Kořenková who is in charge of today's military protocol as well as to the soldiers from Guard of Honour of the Czech Armed

Forces from The Prague Garrison Command and the Olomouc Military Band.

Now, let me invite Ambassador Ferrari to say few words on behalf of the French side.