

President Biden,

Excellences,

Dear all,

Thank you for bringing us together. This is the time we must all mobilize. We need to defend and strengthen democracy. As a NATO and European Union member, Slovakia will do its share.

Not just in Ukraine, our neighbour. Russia's aggression **is** a threat to global peace and democracy. Our support, including military aid, helps the Ukrainians protect their rights, in line with the UN Charter. The world's support for Ukraine's defensive fight, must continue. For as long as it takes. This is our joint investment in peace and democracy.

But we must also do more to strengthen democracy at home. Our citizens need to see, that democracy responds to their needs. That it guarantees true equality before the law. Better public services. More transparency and less corruption. They must feel, that democracy helps bridge, not amplify differences.

Slovakia had a productive Year of Action. We focused on improving the rule of law and our judicial system. Independent judiciary must be a public service available to all citizens and businesses. We introduced a new court system, which has increased accountability of judges and prosecutors, while preserving their independence.

Corruption is another major threat to democracy. It destroys public trust in our institutions. We set up a new independent agency to protect whistleblowers. Our register of beneficial owners helps prevent money laundering in our public procurement system. It will serve as a legal standard across Europe. We invite other global partners to join.

Democracies also face attacks on free media and a rise in disinformation. These are mostly spread through social media. We cannot be naïve and allow freedom of speech to be a cover for verbal crimes, hate speech and lies. 5 years ago, a young Slovak investigative journalist and his fiancée were murdered for his work. Last year, a radicalised teenager killed two young queer people in the streets of our capital. He got radicalised

on social media.

In response, we launched a system to protect journalists if they face threats. We also increased our support for media freedom and independent journalism in Ukraine and the Western Balkans. But we must do more and increase the accountability of social media platforms. Their business model is based on encouraging the lowest of emotions, polarisation and fragmentation. If this, is not a threat to democracy, I don't know what is.

Dear all, we are living in times of several crises. We cannot allow democracy to be the victim of these crises. Because democracy is the solution.

Thank you.