



PRÍHOVOR PREZIDENTA SR
pri príležitosti slávnostného odhalenia orloja
Cedar Rapids (Iowa), 27. 9. 2024

Mr President Pavel,
Dear fellow Slovaks,
Dear Czech brothers and sisters,
Dear American friends, dear Iowans – Hawkeyes,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your warm welcome. It is a great honour for me to be here with you today. It is a real pleasure to see so many nice people across generations with proud Czech and Slovak heritage. So far away – and still – it feels like at home. This is an important and symbolic visit. Presidents Havel, Kováč and Clinton inaugurated the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library back in 1995. Now – after almost 30 years – Czech and Slovak representatives stand here at the banks of the Cedar River again. Many things have changed. Floods swept away many homes in this town. "Derecho" blew away too many bricks. But one thing remains – we stand here together as good friends and allies.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Czechs and Slovaks were arriving in the US on ships together. Looking for a better life, opportunities, and new beginnings. Many were fleeing the horrors of war and later the totalitarian communist repression. Some of them conquered new frontiers, including here in Cedar Rapids – the City of Five Seasons – in the beautiful Hawkeye State of Iowa. Slovakia is grateful to the United States for being a new home to many of our compatriots and for embracing diversity.

Many Slovak and Czech Americans were therefore able to preserve the traditions and culture of their homelands. Our countries are firmly bound by history. It is this country where the ground-breaking Pittsburgh and Cleveland agreements were signed. The US were vital to the creation of an independent and democratic Czechoslovakia – the base of our modern statehood.

Today, Slovakia and Czechia stand side by side as two independent but deeply befriended modern countries – members of the European Union and Allies in NATO together with the US. We believe in the same values of freedom, democracy, self-realization and success. As the President of Slovakia, I feel grateful and touched that Slovakia continues to form an important part of your story and

identity. And I'm sure President Pavel feels the same. Please keep your beautiful and inspiring heritage alive.

At this special moment, I am proud that Slovakia has its share in this beautiful work of art. The twelve sculptures in the clockwork of the Grand Clock Tower – made from Slovak oak wood – were crafted by the hands of Slovak sculptor Andrej Haršány – who is here with us today. They convey a strong message to all compatriots and visitors. They represent twelve professions traditionally practised by Slovaks and Czechs in the US. With their unique skills, they contributed to the welfare and benefit of this country. But they also never fully separated from their roots. Whether a miner, a farmer, or a blacksmith – these sculptures are part of our story. They represent all of us – our nations. Who we became thanks to our ancestors. United by freedom and the quest to leave this world a better place.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

Let me thank the city of Cedar Rapids and the State of Iowa for making it possible for both our communities to thrive here. Let me also thank the wonderful team at the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library. This beautiful Clock Tower is another great accomplishment of this flagship Czech and Slovak cultural institution in the US. You are doing a great job of preserving, educating and representing both nations' heritage and passing it proudly to younger generations.

Dear Slovak and Czech Americans,

Thank you for fostering the Czech-Slovak-American friendship and being Slovakia's goodwill ambassadors. Please always carry your original homelands in your minds and hearts as we carry you in ours.

Thank you. Ďakujem!