

REMARKS AT GATE OF FREEDOM MEMORIAL

Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State

Devin Castle, Bratislava, Slovakia

February 12, 2019

SECRETARY POMPEO: Good morning. It's a tremendous honor to be here to join you in remembering the more than 400 innocents who lost their lives attempting to flee communism. We honor their sacrifice, and it's an honor for me to be here with you today.

It's great to be with the members of the Confederation of Political Prisoners of Slovakia, the group that erected this wonderful memorial.

Among those who we commemorate is Jon Slovincak. Jon was just a teenager when he decided to flee communist rule. He managed to make it all the way to Munich, but was arrested and imprisoned. He was released years later and attempted again to escape by crossing the Danube near the very place that we stand today. He was again captured and imprisoned. Jon and so many others knew that to flee was to risk death, but they still tried. Such is the human yearning for freedom.

I've witnessed this yearning up close. As a young Army officer from 1986 to 1989 during the Cold War, I was tasked with patrolling the Iron Curtain along the Czechoslovakian border. I saw in my early 20s the evils of communism firsthand.

It's been 30 years now since Europe cast off the Soviet yoke. Slovakia, together with the rest of Central Europe, courageously chose to join the transatlantic community of democracies. And what a good decision it was. Slovakia's never been more independent or prosperous than it is today. Where barbed wire and armed guards once stood, today people, goods, and information cross freely.

The United States has stood with the people of Slovakia as a friend, as a partner, and as an ally for the past 30 years, and we will continue to stand with you in the decades to come. This relationship was built on shared values, and now we must sustain it on those same, especially as Russian aggression undermines freedom on this continent, but also against a China that represses people while it's expanding its influence abroad.

We must recommit to our values again and again and again, generation after generation, to ensure that they live on. Memorials like the one that I'm standing in front of ensure that we remember what's at stake.

Today, on behalf of the United States, I'm proud to stand in unity with the people of Slovakia in Europe in recommitting to a future that is more prosperous, secure, and most of all, free. Thank you. (Applause.)

So it's great to be in Slovakia. I just talked about the shared values between our two countries. I talked about the importance of the relationship between each of these two nations. This is a

special place for me. I talked about my role as a young soldier – I saw what happens when repression and tyranny rule a people, and we can't ever take that path again.

So I want to make sure that the Slovakian people understand that America is engaged. We're back. It's been 20 years since a secretary of state came to Slovakia. That's far too long. This administration is committed to standing with the people of Slovakia and helping them achieve their end-state, which is a free, prosperous, and successful Slovakia. I hope we can advance that cause today. That's the mission set.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yeah. I hope that we make substantial progress. The pillars that were agreed to back in Singapore in June, I hope we make progress along each one: security and peace on the peninsula, the denuclearization in the peninsula, as well as ensuring that we create the conditions for a brighter future for the North Korean people. Each one of those points (inaudible).

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