

Ministerial Speech at the 25th Forum 2000 Conference
“Build back democratically in the post-pandemic era: Promoting
Cooperation and Shared Vigilance”

By Dr. Jaushieh Joseph Wu, Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Republic of China (Taiwan)

October 12, 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen, greetings from Taiwan!

Thank you very much for the invitation, Mr. Jakub Klepal, the Executive Director of the Forum 2000 Foundation. I am deeply honored to address the forum again.

I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to congratulate the people of the Czech Republic on your recent election. It is always wonderful and exciting to see democracy in action, especially in a country that has captured the hearts of the Taiwanese people.

Indeed, the Czech Republic has captured the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese people. We stand thousands of miles apart with two distinctively different cultural roots, yet we are closely connected by our common passion for freedom and democracy. We were both under harsh authoritarian rules before the 1990s, but we both embarked on the path of democratization, almost at the same time, and we never looked back. We are both young democracies with

fresh memories of the authoritarian past, and we both endeavor to stride forward. Forum 2000 carries the legacy of late President Havel, and has now become the legacy of the Czech Republic, one that shows the world that you are playing a leading role in safeguarding and promoting freedom and human rights. In Taiwan, we also established the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and the Indo-Pacific Democratic Governance Consultation for the same objective.

My dear friends, Freedom and democracy has brought us together. No authoritarian force, no matter how strong it may be, can set us apart. When the Taiwanese say that the Czech Republic is a friend, we say it from our heart. And we appreciate that many of you have continued to strengthen this special bond based on our shared values.

At the height of the pandemic last year, Senate President Vystrcil visited Taiwan. He carried the torch of his predecessor late Senate President Kubera, who endured tremendous pain and pressure inflicted by China simply for his determination to visit Taiwan. Sadly, President Kubera passed away before he was able to come, but his spirit continues to inspire many more and will stay with us forever.

President Vystrcil, the heartening “I am a Taiwanese” speech you made in our parliament is still remembered, cherished, and

celebrated in Taiwan. There is not a single phrase more powerful to reassure the Taiwanese people that we are not alone in dealing with a giant authoritarian neighbor.

Indeed, we are not alone. We have the Czech Republic as our great friend, who is willing to reach out to us time and again and say “yes, we care.” I have no other way to express my gratitude on behalf of our people but to say again: thank you, the Czech Republic.

We are friends and we are democracies. We support each other enthusiastically; we trade with each other freely; and we contribute however we can wholeheartedly when the other is in need of assistance. Our two countries have shown the spirit of affinity these years, and it will carry us a long way forward.

Ladies and gentlemen, our world is still preoccupied with the pandemic. It has altered our way of life and economic activities. The recurring spikes with repeated lockdowns and travel restrictions in many countries have provided a rich ground for authoritarianism to grow. Around the globe, authoritarian leaders preach that democracy is inferior to authoritarianism, and such rhetoric might have already taken a toll; democracy in the world is in a dangerous trend of recession, as pointed out by Stanford University’s renowned scholar Larry Diamond.

Yes, the leading authoritarian state has taken full advantage of the pandemic to exercise its influence by providing vaccines and relief materials, supplemented with heavy doses of disinformation and propaganda.

We have also learned a lesson during this period of time that relying on a single source for the supply of critical materials can bear serious consequences. There is a genuine urgency in the worldwide call to restructure the supply chains so that they stay resilient. And most important of all, it has become obvious that supply chains have to be in the hands of trusted partners, not the ones who view trade as a weapon. Taiwan, along with Australia, Canada, and Lithuania have all learned our lessons.

It was also during this period of time that a National Security Law was imposed on Hong Kong, a place used to be seen as a symbol of freedom and openness in East Asia. Not anymore. Those who dare voice dissent in the Hong Kong Legislative Council were disqualified one by one, until none is left in the institution which is supposed to be the bastion of free speech. And the recently formed electoral committee speaks in a monotone—with only a repetitive voice of loyalty and obedience to Beijing. Now we know the authoritarianism is perfectly capable of forfeiting the rights many have taken for granted.

Situated in East Asia, Taiwan is constantly on alert of the

expansion of authoritarianism. After Hong Kong is down, the PLA has intensified its military, especially Air Force, activities near Taiwan. Their daily incursions into our ADIZ, together with infiltration, cyberattack, disinformation, and hybrid warfare, have put our democracy under acute threat.

Of course, on authoritarianism, China is not a lone wolf. European friends are frank to us in pointing out that their big neighbor to the east is also engaging in cyberattacks, disinformation campaign, and hybrid warfare aiming at disrupting their democratic processes. We have seen at times the two major authoritarian states joining hands with their junior partners in East Europe to threaten some of our friends.

We noticed the alarming military exercises, hybrid warfare and disinformation campaign, and the influx of refugees have caused problems for some countries in this region. Our new and good friend Lithuania is enduring all these. In addition, the Chinese government has weaponized the trade to bring misery to some Lithuanians. In short, authoritarianism is on the march, and democracy is on the defense.

Ladies and gentlemen, the current international situation warrants democracies to respond together and support each other to ward off the threat to our belief in freedom and democracy. As Lithuania's Foreign Minister Landsbergis put it succinctly in June:

“freedom-loving people should look out for each other.” We appreciate the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania and Poland, along with Japan and the United States, for providing Taiwan with Covid vaccines for us to protect our people and fight back the Chinese disinformation attacks. Taiwan will do its best to honor this shared spirit of unity and continue to support our friends in Europe, too.

My dear friends, the pandemic will subside eventually, but our fight to safeguard our belief in freedom and democracy is far from over. We, the fellow democracies, should stay vigilant and watch out for each other while we endeavor to build back better together. It is especially important for us in East Asia and for you in East Europe to remain united, for we are on the front line of this fight. And to prevail in this fight, I believe that unity is our only path forward. Fellow democracies, unite!

Thank you.