Deputy Minister Jurečka, Ambassadors, my fellow Executive Committee Members, dear Guests,

I want to begin my remarks with some personal thoughts about this city, Prague, this country: the Czech Republic and the people who live here: the Czech people. I first came here on a visit from Germany where I was a student in 1964. I instantly fell in love with this charming city and its people. I came back again and again and I was here, 54 years ago during the Prague Spring in 1968.

I saw something then that has stayed with me for my entire life. I didn’t just witness what life was like when oppression was lifted, I actually felt it. I could see it in people’s faces. I could hear it in the way they spoke. It gave me a new understanding of what freedom really meant. I left a few weeks before the Soviet tanks came in and crushed the mass protests and the liberal movement. I remember watching on television as the tanks rolled down the streets with all of those people standing on the sidewalks seeing their dreams evaporate. Those images made me cry. But my experience here gave me a sense of the Czech people that I have never forgotten. In the Czech people I saw a sense of fairness, of liberty, and I saw true courage.

In some ways I see some of those same traits today in another country just 15-hundred kilometers away.

Of course, I am speaking about Ukraine. Looking back on this period from the vantage point of more than 50 years, I can still remember sharing the excitement of your people and then I felt the crushing end. But then came the Velvet Revolution and I was back again. I met with Vaclav Havel and, shortly after that, I purchased my first television station here, TV Nova. That was the beginning of my company European Central Media. During that time, I met and spent a little time with Alexander Dubcek, a meeting I will never forget.

On a very personal note, my family left Mainz, Germany in 1450 because the people there blamed the Jews for the Black Plague and the first to take them in were the Czech people. So, you see I don’t just come here tonight as the President of the World Jewish Congress, I come to Prague as someone who knows and has a deep respect for the Czech people and I am grateful for what they did for my family. You see, this is also very personal.

Back in 1968, amidst the excitement of the new freedom, there was one thing I did NOT see - there was no hatred of Jews anywhere in this country.

None.

So, it saddens me greatly to see the growing hatred of Jews now here in the Czech Republic, throughout Europe and even in my own country, the United States. You all know the numbers, I don’t have to go through them with you. Sadly but, perhaps, not surprisingly, whenever the world experiences major shifts the first target is always the Jewish people. Today is no different. The greatest target for this worldwide hysteria is the Jewish State of Israel.

More than 70 years after its founding, Israel is the only country on earth that has to justify its existence every single day.

This craziness can be captured in one statistic.

Last year the U.N. General Assembly voted to condemn countries 19 times.

14 against Israel. 5 for the rest of the world. You all know this is totally absurd, yet the world goes along with this charade every single day. The targeting of Israel is just one more part of the age-old
hatred of the Jewish people. Deputy Minister Jurečka there are few people who would understand this better than the Czech people.

30 years before the Prague Spring, Czechoslovakia was the first country that the world abandoned when it tried to appease Adolf Hitler. Czechs lost their freedom and their country in 1938 and the entire world looked the other way.

So with your very special history in mind, I want you to consider something.

On July 1, your country, the Czech Republic, will take its turn as leader of the European Union. The E.U. has already made strong statements concerning the hatred against Jews and we are certainly very grateful for this. But, now we implore the Czech Government to make sure that the E.U. follows through on its words and promises with real action that will - once and for all - put a stop to Europe’s irrational hatred of Jewish people.

Let’s be honest, the hatred of Jews will never go away with nice words.

But there IS a way to fight this hatred.

First... through education. Young people must be taught the fundamental lesson that when societies go after any group of people because of their religion or their color, it eventually hurts all people and it denigrates their country. Here especially young people should be taught that any form of bigotry is NOT what the Czech people are about. Today marks the 77th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe. On May 8, 1945, the world celebrated the Nazi surrender. Yes, over 6-million Jews were slaughtered but when it was finally over more than 60 million people were killed THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

Hitler aimed his hatred at the Jews first and then he aimed his hatred at practically every other country in Europe. The World Jewish Congress is prepared to help you fight hate in schools, particularly the hate against Jewish people. We want one day - January 27 - which marks the liberation of Auschwitz to be set aside in all schools throughout the world...to learn about the Holocaust. We have created curriculums and we are making a film to be shown in all schools on that day - January 27- that will tell the story of the Holocaust through the eyes of the survivors the last witnesses.

This, I think, will teach students what the Holocaust was really about and it will have a major impact on the fight against the hatred of Jews. This particular hatred and the hatred of all people will not go away when hatemongers face NO consequences for their actions. There must be absolutely NO tolerance for any hatred in Europe and the United States. After the end of the Second World War, when we all saw the photographs of the gas chambers and the piles of bodies and we learned the names Auschwitz and Treblinka no one in their right mind wanted to be associated with Nazis. But now we are almost 80 years and 4 generations past that time and students today don’t even know what happened and why it happened. We must all make sure they learn this vital lesson. Their must also be real laws with stiff penalties along with real law enforcement so people who hate will learn there is no place for this hatred in society. This is something you can do in the leadership position of the E.U. Think of this, Deputy Minister Jurečka, what an earth-shattering change the Czech Republic could actually make at this important moment. It is high time for the European council to establish a permanent working group on combating the hatred of Jews as well as all forms of racism. There is something else that we must have zero tolerance for. When a country promises-again and again - to wipe another country off the face of the map the entire world should stand up and say in one, large, unified voice: STOP.
I’m talking, of course, about Iran’s promise to wipe Israel off the map. Why is this even allowed to continue? Iran should be isolated, sanctioned and shunned from the entire world. We seem to forget that when a country threatens another country with invasion it CAN actually happen.

Back in 1948 when the brand new country of Israel was fighting for its very life, the world turned its back on the brand new Jewish state but there was one country that sent weapons for the Jewish people to defend themselves and that was Czechoslovakia... and for that the Jewish people are forever grateful.

Finally I want to address the war in Ukraine. I know everyone is thinking about this tonight. It is the main topic of conversation. For the World Jewish Congress we are mindful of not just the Jewish community of Ukraine, but all the people of Ukraine. We are mindful of the countries that surround Ukraine - Poland, Belarus, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova.

And we are also thinking of the large community of Jews in Russia as well.

We have watched in horror, the terrible destruction we have also witnessed - with tremendous pride - the courage of the Ukrainian people. I had just left Poland where I met with President Duda when I watched the first attacks in Ukraine. It took me back 54 years and brought back memories of the courage of the Czech people facing Soviet tanks.

Unfortunately back then... the world turned its back on the Czech people... just as it had in 1938.

I am at least grateful that the world seems to have learned a lesson from 1938. All of the neighboring countries have opened up their doors and their hearts to the large stream of refugees fleeing Ukraine. This past Friday, I met with the Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, Piotr Glinski... who told me that his country has now taken in more than 3 million refugees. Amazingly, most of these 3 million people have been taken in by families and are living with them in their homes. Their children have been placed in schools... where they feel welcomed.

This gives us all hope when we see the better angels of our nature. We come here, ladies and gentlemen, with so much respect for this country and its people. All of our fellow executive board members of the World Jewish Congress, come here with great hope.

Let this moment be the beginning of the end of the irrational hatred that has haunted this continent for far too long. Let this be the moment that changes our lives for the better.

The Jewish people will always continue to contribute to the world in so many different ways - in medicine... science...literature... the arts and more. But, we look to the world to treat us with the same respect, the same safety and the same understanding that all people deserve.

MAY GOD PROTECT THE JEWISH PEOPLE.
MAY GOD PROTECT THE GREAT CZECH PEOPLE.
Děkuji vám moc.