

June 3, 2026, National Chengchi University

Responsibility as Our Shared Task

Ladies and gentlemen, hello to everyone!

I cannot help but begin with a memory.

More than six years ago, on February 19, 2020, as fate would have it, I was elected President of the Czech Senate. This happened following the unexpected death of my friend and predecessor, the then-President of the Czech Senate, Jaroslav Kubera.

It was Jaroslav Kubera who was the father of the idea of visiting Taiwan. I decided to carry out his idea despite the reservations of many politicians and that brought me to you in Taiwan at the end of August 2020. And today, looking back, I would like to add that I am very grateful for that.

During my first visit to you, I very much hoped that Jaroslav Kubera's widow, his wife Věra Kuberová, could come to Taiwan with me. Unfortunately, due to her health, it was not possible at the end. At that time, I made a promise to myself that I would try again to bring someone who carries on the family tradition and the name of Jaroslav Kubera to Taiwan. Today, on my second visit, I have succeeded.

It is a great honour for me that Jaroslav Kubera's daughter, Mrs. Vendula Vinšová Kuberová, is here with us today.

I greatly appreciate this; I am happy that the promise has been fulfilled, and I believe that Jaroslav Kubera is looking down on us from above with a smile.

Thank you, Vendula, for your participation. I am sending my regards from afar to your mum Věra, Jaroslav Kubera's wife.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear students,

when I learned that, as part of my second visit to your Taiwan, I had been entrusted with the honour of addressing you at the university with opening remarks at the conference titled "Václav Havel's Dialogues: Human Rights and Responsibility in a Changing World," I was immediately overcome by several emotions at once.

First, there was pride and joy mixed with gratitude that here in Taiwan, you have not forgotten Václav Havel. I want to thank you for that; it is very encouraging to me.

At the same time, however, I also felt concern—or rather, doubt—whether I would be able to live up to the expectations placed upon me, because I do not have detailed knowledge of Václav Havel's work.

Rather than a playwright and writer, Václav Havel is for me a courageous man, a dissident, and later an extraordinary, charismatic statesman with a broad vision and timeless ideals. At

the same time—and I want to emphasize this—I have never really viewed Václav Havel as a typical politician.

When I then took a closer look at your conference programme, I felt a bit more at ease. The panellists at your conference are wonderful people, and I have no doubt that at least some of them are familiar with Václav Havel's work and his life story in detail.

This gives me the opportunity to share just a few memories of Václav Havel that are very important to me and to look at Václav Havel's legacy through my own eyes.

My first memory is of a surprising newspaper advertisement and the first photograph of Václav Havel published at the time in the still-communist press.

My second memory is of the events of 1996, which symbolically connect Taiwan, the Czech Senate, and Václav Havel.

In conclusion, I will say a few words about Václav Havel's legacy and about ourselves.

So let's take it step by step. It is October 1989, and Czechoslovakia is still under the rule of the Communist Party. The party newspaper *Rudé Právo* (*literally Red Law*) writes daily in its pages about the successes of building of socialism and celebrates the people's achievements in it. The reality, however, is different; people are more and more dissatisfied, and the authoritarian regime is becoming increasingly unbearable to them. In pubs, people are whispering forbidden jokes more and more often. Communist power is waning, losing support, and growing nervous.

In this atmosphere, on October 7, 1989, citizens of what was still Communist Czechoslovakia open the Communist daily *Rudé Právo*. There is an advertisement that seems unremarkable at first glance, featuring a photograph of a man whose friends are using this medium to wish him a happy 53rd birthday. At first glance, nothing out of the ordinary.

But wait—soon, thanks to the bush telegraph, the whole country knows that the photo of the man in the ad is that of a 53-year-old Václav Havel, whom the Communist Party considers a class enemy.

Rudé Právo is selling like never before. People can't believe that a congratulatory ad featuring a photo of the hated dissident Václav Havel actually appeared in the Communist Party's newspaper.

Václav Havel is not listed under his real name, but as Ferdinand Vaněk, who was his alter ego from one of his plays. The Communist editors at *Rudé Právo* did not get the joke, this bit of mischief, and failed to spot it.

And so the entire nation is having a great laugh at the Communists' expense, and Communist power is crumbling a little more.

The climax of this absurd drama which no one could have anticipated at that time is that three months after the ad was published, at the end of 1989, the dissident Václav Havel became our president and brought our country back into the democratic world.

And then they say miracles aren't possible. It's the opposite—people have tremendous power.

From today's perspective, it's actually simple. It's a well-known fact, after all.

Authoritarians don't understand the power of humour or hyperbole because they don't understand people, and that's why they can't defeat democrats.

It is a great lesson for us democrats. Let's not succumb to populism or authoritarianism, and let's not allow censorship. By doing so, we weaken what is most precious: democracy.

Now I will take you back to 1996, that is, 30 years ago.

I consider 1996 to be a very significant year in connection with my journey to you, as well as with what is happening in the world today, because it symbolically connects Taiwan, the Czech Senate, and Václav Havel.

And I hold all three of them deep in my heart.

I will begin with the 30th anniversary connected to Taiwan by expressing my great appreciation and congratulations. In 1996, 30 years ago, the first direct presidential election took place in Taiwan on March 23.

This marked the definitive transition from the authoritarian regime to democracy in your country. Political power was legitimized for the first time through a direct mandate from the citizens to the President of Taiwan. This marked the culmination of the democratic process that Taiwan began in the 1980s. It was achieved through peaceful means, and in this respect, the Czech Republic and Taiwan are similar—and, in fact, similarly exceptional in the world.

Be proud of this or let us be proud of this. Once again, my deepest appreciation and congratulations.

The Czech Republic and Taiwan simply understand each other; we are more connected than we realize.

I now turn from the 30th anniversary of the completion of your democratic process to the 30th anniversary concerning our Czech Senate.

Our supreme legislative body, the Czech Parliament, has two chambers: the Chamber of Deputies, which is the lower chamber of the Czech Parliament, and the Senate, which is its upper chamber.

The main task of the Czech Senate, as the upper chamber of the Czech Parliament, is to protect the constitutional order. We say here—and I am convinced that it is true—that the Senate is the safeguard of our democracy.

It was right in 1996, on December 18—that is, 30 years ago—that the first constituent session of the Czech Senate took place. The democratic process in the Czech Republic was thus effectively brought to a kind of conclusion since the Czech Constitution was finally accomplished.

Before leaving for Taiwan, we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Senate's inaugural session together with the senators. After thirty years, we gave the Senate the motto "Senate: Committed to Freedom." I am very proud of this.

In this context, however, I would like to add some very important words.

Freedom also entails responsibility. Please let us not forget that. It is impossible to be committed to freedom and not be committed to responsibility, for then there is a danger that commitment to freedom will turn into populism or even anarchy.

And I come to the third set of thirties, to the third anniversary. As I promised, it is connected with President Václav Havel.

It was almost exactly 30 years ago, on May 15, 1996, when President Václav Havel was asked to deliver a key speech at the award ceremony of the prestigious Charlemagne Prize. Václav Havel delivered a famous speech titled "Europe as a Task."

I do not know whether Václav Havel already had some feeling or intuition back then, but his speech begins with the observation that, while researching the origin of the word "Europe," he came to realize that the term "Europe" has its roots in the Akkadian word "erbu," meaning twilight or sunset.

Personally, I believe that this is indeed the case today: in Europe—and not only in Europe—one stage of our development is coming to an end, or, if you will, a kind of dusk is setting in.

However, from my perspective, this does not signify anything bad or sad; quite the other way round. After all, we all know that after dusk comes dawn, and the sun rises again.

And that is precisely our task today. To do everything we can to ensure that the life-giving sun rises over us once again.

I believe you understand why I am saying this here in Taiwan, in your democratic and free country.

For it is our shared task—the task of democratic and free nations—to cooperate.

To strengthen our security through mutual protection and support.

To cooperate and enhance our competitiveness.

To increase our resilience and strategic independence.

I am convinced that in today's world, resilience and security are more important than immediate profit or the lowest possible price.

As I have already said, freedom comes with responsibility. And I repeat, security is more important than immediate welfare. Resilience is more important than the immediate profit.

Nor must we ever forget what is most important.

Security, resilience, and the rule of law are the fruits of democracy. These fruits ensure a bright future for us, and their fertile ground is respect for human beings and their rights, and respect for values.

Values such as solidarity, justice, responsibility, wisdom, moderation, courage, hope, and faith—and Václav Havel would certainly add that truth and love come first.

Because it is precisely truth and love that triumph over lies and hatred.

I am coming to a close. I have not been exactly brief, and I apologize for that; thank you very much for listening to me.

In closing, I'd like to tell you that I came back to Taiwan to see you again—perhaps mainly—so that I could listen to you. So that we could engage in dialogue. So that we may share our views and reflect on them. I want to speak, chat and discuss with everyone who is interested in engaging in dialogue.

It is important; it is essential for the future of this world.

Some of us will have the opportunity this afternoon to attend the unveiling of the Václav Havel Bench here in Taipei. Together, we will thus commemorate Václav Havel and, once again, the importance of dialogue.

For it is precisely this bench—and it does not have to be just a Václav Havel bench—that symbolically invites us to sit down, to discuss, to engage in dialogue.

And it is just dialogue that is the fundamental source of trust and cooperation.

This is true in the Czech Republic as much as in Taiwan and anywhere else in the world.

Let us not forget this. Let us learn to engage in dialogue, trust one another more, and cooperate in the interest of our countries, in the interest of equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, and in the interest of defending, protecting, and strengthening freedom and democracy.

For we have a shared task: to honourably bear our responsibility.

Thank you.