Your excellency Minister Liimets, excellencies, dear colleagues - ambassadors,

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, dear friends,

It is a great privilege and honour also for me to welcome you on behalf of the **Czech Embassy in Tallinn** at the 7th edition of the Annual Tallinn Conference on Eastern Partnership.

I have to say I was extremely delighted when Gert approached me with the proposal to be a partner in this year´s edition of the Conference. As you well know, the Eastern Partnership has been a **constant priority of Czech foreign policy** ever since its inception. In fact, we consider ourselves kind of “godfathers” of the initiative, having hosted the first ever EaP summit in Prague during our EU Presidency back in 2009.

And as our second EU presidency is approaching fast – in the second half of 2022 – I can assure you that whatever the composition of the government in Prague, the Eastern Partnership will feature high on our agenda yet again. The overarching motive that we would like to advance during our presidential term is increasing **resilience** of our Eastern partners. This became especially important in the context of Covid-19 pandemic which exposed our Eastern neighbours to new challenges. We want to approach resilience in broad terms and focus on different areas of societal life – for instance **media**, **migration** **and mobility**, but also on **municipal resilience** as well as its **security aspects**. Apart from resilience, we are thinking of putting emphasis also on **economic co-operation** and **environment**. We do think that in both domains, the EU can be a valuable partner for our Eastern neighbours.

I will refrain from trying to assess the success or failures of the policy to date. What matters is that EaP remains **firmly anchored in the EU policy framework** with a **solid funding** in the current Multiannual Financial Framework and the NDICI instrument.

And I am glad that both Estonia and Czechia share the same strategic objective of making the Eastern Partners **democratic, secure and prosperous**. We see that not all of them might share the same degree of appetite for this. The **Associated Trio** clearly wants the EU to offer them more and we think that we should make that offer. We regret that **Belarus** has opted for suspending their participation. But EaP is a voluntary project, not the one that we would impose. I firmly believe that time will come when Belarus will re-evaluate its position. Despite visible differences among Eastern partners, we can still make progress on issues that interest all of them, thus keeping the **multilateral track** of EaP up and running.

I also need to emphasize that with Estonia we have a very successful co-operation in implementing practical seminars focused on **public administration reform** in Eastern Partnership countries. These have been organized already for a few years in close co-operation between the **Czech Foreign Ministry** and **Estonian Centre for Eastern Partnership**, now part of newly created **Estonian Centre for International Development**. One such seminar has just taken place here in Tallinn in the last two days, focused on resilience of public administration in **digital sphere**. I want to thank all of the organizers and participating institutions for making it happen.

Ladies and gentlemen, needless to say that the relations between the EU and its Eastern partners face numerous challenges these days, but I hope that this conference will contribute greatly to better mutual understanding of these challenges and to finding ways of tackling them jointly. Enjoy the conference!