Remarks at the Second European Conference of Ventotene for Freedom and Democracy

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Thank you, Mr. Talia, Mr. Vernetti, and of course the Honorable Madam Vice President of the European Parliament, Madame Picierno. I want to extend first my gratitude to Madame Picierno for inviting me here to this conversation, for including Taiwan in this important discussion on the future of freedom and democracy.

It's especially meaningful for us to be here on the island of Ventotene.
I understand that Ventotene has a very extraordinary history, where during the difficult and dark days of Europe, Altiero Spinelli and others who were fighting totalitarianism were incarcerated here. But through this experience came the Ventotene Manifesto, which was a conversation about integration and cooperation for peace and the future of Europe.

But of course, today we are under very different circumstances. For the Indo-Pacific region and for Taiwan, we also went through a very challenging period of democratization. This year, we are commemorating 30 years since the end of our first presidential election, which followed the end of 37 years of martial law and a long period of colonialism. Like the people and freedom fighters here at Ventotene, many freedom fighters in Taiwan also fought for freedom and democracy under very difficult circumstances. And that is why today in Taiwan we enjoy free elections, the freedom of speech, the opportunity for open discussion and debate, as

we have here tonight in Ventotene.

But I think we have to deal with some new realities, and that is the original vision for an integrated and peaceful Europe is now facing new circumstances. The Russian invasion of Ukraine challenges our assumptions for peace. And also economic relationships create not only opportunities, but there are some new vulnerabilities as well.

In Taiwan, our democracy is also facing significant military and gray zone tactics. I hope that is a celebration for freedom (Fireworks in the background) It's Friday night, and I think it's a time for us to extend greater appreciation for freedom because so many people fought so hard for it, and we can never take freedom for granted.

But as in Taiwan, we are facing increasing military and gray zone pressures on our survival, on our democracy. We also have a response to that, to defend it, and that is why in Taiwan we are working to strengthen our economy, but also to strengthen our defense capabilities.

In addition, we are building whole-of-society resilience, whether it is in resilient communications, resilient responses to crisis situations, and also more resilient critical infrastructure, energy, a more resilient economy, all of these are pressing challenges, which brings Taiwan and Europe to a shared situation, and that is, we are not only dealing with new challenges. We also have many shared interests.

We have a shared interest in ensuring that differences are resolved peacefully. We have a shared interest in ensuring that democratic wishes are respected, and that large countries do not determine the future of

smaller countries through threats and coercion.

Whether it is Ventotene or Taiwan, no island is too small to have a voice, and no island or no society is too small to deserve respect.

And that is why it is meaningful for Taiwan to be part of this conversation, because as we look ahead, Taiwan and Europe are not only working together to defend values that are important for us, but Taiwan is not only a geopolitical headline.

Taiwan is made up of people just like the people here in Italy: resourceful, generous, warm human beings who also strive for human dignity and freedom.

So again, thank you for this invitation to be here, and I must say that it took my delegation and I 27 hours to get here, from departing my home in Taipei to arriving here through air, land, and sea, and actually pretty stormy weather yesterday, but despite that, it is so meaningful for us to be here, and it’s an important time to be included in these conversations.

So thank you again for making this happen, and thanks to all of you for standing in Taiwan.