Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening Ladies and Gentlemen; Conference Co-Chairs: President Bai, President Chen, President Meadows and Director Luterbacher; our Distinguished Speakers; dear Colleagues and dear Guests attending in person or following us online.

It is truly an honour for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, as a founding member of ANSO and a member of the ANSO Governing Board, to be one of the hosts of this extraordinary event.

In my capacity as Vice-President for Natural Sciences, I am delighted to share my thoughts with you on this Forum and Conference delivering to all those who are engaged in research related to the Silk Road. But First of all, let me express my gratitude to Professor Bai Chunli, President of ANSO, Co-hosts: to the Association for Trans-Eurasia Exchange and Silk-Road Civilization Development and the UNESCO Beijing Office for inviting me to give this welcome speech.

The theme of today’s event is “Evolution of the Silk Road Civilization and Environment Change”. Nothing proves the importance of the Silk Road more than the fact that nine years ago it was added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites under the official full name “Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang’an-Tianshan”.

This network spanning over thousands of kilometres, connecting civilizations, enabled the exchange of commercial products, scientific knowledge, technological innovations, cultural, artistic and religious values between the East and West. By connecting ancient societies for a period of roughly 1,500 years, the Silk Road contributed to the development of many of the world's great civilizations, while leaving its mark on the natural environment as well. It is therefore the duty of the international community – and the scientific community in particular – to preserve this heritage and research its past. This is a mission which can be truly effective only if experts who are engaged in can regularly share their scientifically analysed results, methods, and questions with each other. It is exactly what this Forum and Conference event is about to provide: an excellent opportunity to enrich our unbiased knowledge about the development of the cultures and civilizations along the Silk Road and the changes in its natural environment.

I invite you to listen closely to the speakers and participants of the conference, as their expert knowledge will not only depict the past, but will also lead us to a professional understanding of our own and each other's culture in its current form.

Let me say a few words about the role of Hungary in the noble mission. In Hungary, Oriental research has a century-long tradition, one of the excellent sources of which is the Oriental Collection of the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In
recent years, intensive research has been carried out in our country regarding the regions along the Silk Road. In particular, the Silk Road Research Group was established in 2017 as part of a cooperation between the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University (in short: ELTE) and the University of Szeged. In 2018, this Research Group together with the ELTE Confucius Institute, organized a conference entitled “Migration, Meeting and Interaction of Cultures Along the Silk Road”. The following year, MTA jointly held its successful international conference with the Library and Information Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, entitled “The formation of the North-Western branch of the Silk Roads and its historical consequences. DUNHUANG AND CULTURAL CONTACT ALONG THE SILK ROAD”. Lately, the “ELTE Roman World and Far East” Research Group was established with the support of ELTE’s Excellence Fund. The Group’s objective is to study ancient long-distance communication systems, primarily in relation to the Roman world, Southeast Asia and China.

Lead researchers Dr Krisztina Hoppál and Dr Melinda Pap will report on this project in more detail over the next days. Dr Zsolt Szilágyi, a researcher at the Institute of Ethnography of the Research Centre for the Humanities, who will be delivering his presentation on site, will summarize for you the most significant achievements in the field of Inner Asia research by the 200-year-old Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ethnography.

This year's Silk Road Week ended yesterday at the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou. The guest of honour was Hungary, which presented 16th- and 17th-century luxury silk fabrics, velvets, and decorative weapons from the Eszterházy collection of the Hungarian Museum of Applied Arts. Like the nobility of many other countries, members of the former Hungarian aristocracy were also captivated by exotic silk, spices, porcelain and other treasures, which mostly reached Europe via the Silk Road. Although the western end of the Silk Road is geographically far from Hungary, its influence on our culture is undeniable, which is one of the reasons why we Hungarians are also driven by curiosity to research the Silk Road.

This year is special in that, for the first time since the end of the pandemic, the world's best Silk Road researchers can gather here, near the starting point of the Silk Road.

I wish you all a highly intriguing and inspiring exchange of views over the three days of the event. The knowledge that we will have accumulated here will serve as a great addition to the efforts to preserve this unique World Heritage Site which is the Silk Road.

Thank you!