

## Speech by Viktor Orbán at the Conference

### *"The Relevance and Heritage of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution"*

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An unusual event attracted the attention of Londoners preparing to leave for work in the morning of 24th October 1956. The British radio very rarely interrupted its customary musical programme to read the news. They only did so if news were released of her Majesty being in a critical condition. While on that particular morning, the British radio made an exception to announce the news of the revolution that had broken out on the preceding day. And in the next few days and weeks the world focused attention on Hungary. In the editorial offices of the international press and radios the complete words of Sándor Petőfi lay on the desks of the editors in chief next to daily reports, and for the first time in 108 years, the world spoke of Hungary as in 1948-49. It was no accident, many, really many people thought that something extraordinary and elevating had been born.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Chairman, Members of Parliament, distinguished President Martens, ex-President of the Commission, Jacques Santer, dear friends!

50 years later the first thought is gratitude. Thanks to those who showed solidarity and sent us help, gratitude to those who offered their thoughts to the refugees, as well as those who took us back to Europe 40 years later. Special thanks to the representatives of the Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria and Germany, being with us today, who all showed solidarity with Hungary in '56. Our Polish friends and Poznan must be mentioned with a special emphasis because the events in the spring and summer of that year represented and exercised a special inspiration on the Hungarians in '56.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Great things are usually born at least expected times and places. The most splendid revolution of the 20th century broke out in Hungary in '56. In addition to a political message communicated to the world, the Hungarian revolution confirmed the most profound teaching of Christianity.

In '56, it turned out that the most ambitious objective set for communism, namely the transformation of the human nature, failed. It became clear, that there was not such a thing as the communist personality, the *homo sovieticus*, who cuts off his faith, family, nation, cuts his roots and becomes a global proletarian. It became clear that no power, no violence, no manipulation, no tricks could speed away unwritten laws of several thousands of years. Obviously, 23rd October is a celebration not only for Hungary and the Hungarians, but the entire Europe and probably the entire world. After a long time, Hungary contributed to the world heritage with another piece. It is important for us, for us Hungarians, because the rest of the world can have a more profound insight in Hungary and perhaps a better understanding of who we are. A peculiar nation in Europe, being no Latin, no German, no Slavic, but having

our own state existing for more than one thousand years in Europe. The '56 heroes did not live just somewhere in the world. They lived in Hungary. They were not merely some people. They were actually Hungarians.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the first few decades of the 20th century, Hungary lost three million citizens in the aftermath of World War 1, and later on another one and a half million people fled from poverty and misery as a result of an economic crisis. In addition to the victims of the battles during World War 2 we lost hundreds of thousands of Jewish compatriots. Then, after World War 2, 200,000 Hungarians of German origin were driven out of Hungary. After the '56 revolution was suppressed, 200,000 of the highest qualified Hungarians left the country again and achieved success somewhere else.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Between 1950 and 2000, Hungary was the third slowest growing population in the world. You can understand that despite favourable political changes - the Russians have left, Hungary is a member of NATO and the European Union - our country and our people are in a crisis because of the critical demographic situation. As a result of the sufferings of the 20th century we are now forced to think of ourselves in terms of existence or non-existence. It is also well-known that our history was far from being triumphal in earlier centuries either. In the 300 years preceding '56, we fought four wars of independence and were defeated on every occasion. Perhaps this is enough to explain that there is a nation in Europe whose history has been nothing else than struggle without achieving a single victory for several centuries. There is a nation that needs to be victorious.

This is why the Hungarians still keep searching for the higher sense of the 20th century, which was a real ordeal for them. We are looking for the thing, we want to know actually, what it was that overcame the Hungarian nation and what was the cause of such tremendous sacrifices and afflictions. There must have been a sense behind all the defeats. The '56 revolution put down with ruthless violence also had its benefit. Hungary saved Europe from communism. Hungarians saved Europe from communism, but they were never able to save themselves from it. This was unfair but not senseless. We revealed the real nature of communism, to the western world, they could learn it without the need to personally undergo such experiences. In '56 we inflicted a mortal wound upon the communist world empire, a wound that started to increase right away.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends!

Fifty years ago many people thought that the communist ideology and socialism were some kind of a progressive experiment that led to a higher level of democracy. Fifty years ago many people thought in the western part of Europe that the army of the Soviet Union was indeed stationed in the occupied countries as a liberator. Western Europe had no evidences to decide disputes on this matter. The press, the intellectuals and the trade unions increasingly shifted towards the left in the west. In a number of countries, the communists' rise to power was imminent. Western Europe had no idea whatsoever of the destructive trend it was threatened by. In that historical moment in '56 the Hungarians provided evidence in their own blood. The communist misconception proved false, the illusion of socialism vanished and the Soviet Union was revealed. It turned out to be incorrigible, and no compromise could be made on it, the only sound aim was to eliminate it. The outstanding politicians of the west understood the

message. First they got the evil empire out of breath and then drove it to bankruptcy. The gate to the long way leading to the elimination of the Soviet Union was opened by us, Hungarians, and we are proud of it.

Dear friends!

Without the sacrifice made by the Hungarians who fought in '56, the Iron Curtain would probably still be in place, the wall would divide Berlin into two. Europe would still be lying cut in two halves inert and having stiff points. Hungary didn't ask much in return. The single thing we want the European Union to consider is: the 4th of November was the date when the Hungarian revolution was crushed. And we ask you - I mean the European Union - to consider declaring that day as a day of commemoration for the victims of communism of Europe.

Of course lots of efforts were necessary to put down the communist forces in Europe. Each effort was heroic and conditional to the final victory. But '56 has a unique character. The '56 revolutionaries demanded directly and immediately the national independence of the country, stepping out of the Warsaw Pact and a western-type free election based on multi-party system.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

One of the challenges we must face is the common heritage. Although Europe has managed to escape from communism, its heritage still lingers on. By now, the whole Europe has been grappling with the communist heritage and according to all indications this will be the case for some length of time. This is because in Central European countries once occupied by it, communism institutionalised. Or to put it in another way: nationalised nearly all evil things, European people struggled against during the 19th and 20th centuries. In the countries put under communist control, corruption, moral relativism, poverty, defencelessness, governments providing false data, politicians refusing to take responsibility, and political lies have been institutionalised. Now the entire European Union must face them as a problem within its borders. I am not sure, Ladies and Gentlemen, which is more difficult to get rid of: a bad system or its burdensome heritage. Certainly, both are hard and demanding tasks. However, history teaches us that none of them is impossible if we keep together. This is why the European Union must make it clear that on no consideration it is willing to lend a hand to liar and misleading governments that have not broken free of the moral legacy of communism.

There is a price of all lies. Somebody has to pay the bill. Today, now the Hungarian citizens pay the price in the form of austerity measures, and the budget for the next year is nothing else than the price of a lie.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Chairman,

This anniversary is probably the right time to declare that unlike the discourses showed in the last decade, the real danger for Central Europe is not the extreme right ideas or rebirth of that kind of political forces. They don't play an influential role in Central Europe. The real challenge to democracies is the renewing post communist tradition of exercising power. This extreme left tradition ruled and infected our societies for decades. Consequently, it is a heavy and relevant heritage. The intention to create political and business monopolies, to use lie, cheat, corruption and violence in order to get and to keep the power.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This anniversary is a proper moment also to highlight why Central Europeans are so much committed the transatlantic ideas as we are. Why we insist on so consequently creating a strong union of European peoples and strong ties to the United States at the same time. At first glance it does not seem logical. We remember that despite the echoing calls of western intellectuals, this illusion of communism, Nikita Khrushchev was elected as man of the year by Time Magazine in '57 whereas two years later his American host did not even mention the military intervention during his visit to the United States. In the following three decades Hungary was put on a boycotting list and was forgotten for western diplomacy. So at first glance it does not seem logical to be a transatlantic supporter but, Ladies and Gentlemen, this is one side of the coin. But there is another one. Without a clear American strategy and bulk of efforts targeted to dissolve the Soviet Union it would have been impossible to free the central European nations, like Poland, Hungary and all the others. We do not forget another lesson either we got in the decade after the deliberation of the ex-soviet zone. Without having the involvement of Americans, Europe alone would not have been able to pacify the Balkans, to stabilize the region. How much we would wish to see Europe strong enough to do it. But it is not. In one sentence: fifty years ago we failed because the Americans left us alone, sixteen years ago we won, because the Americans did not leave us alone.

And finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to share with you one of my personal views. After a decade of hesitation, uncertainty and decline, the Russians have now found the proper answer how to get out of the age of retreat and how to open up the chapter of expansion. How to influence and dominate the areas previously controlled by them. We, Europeans, have no common answer. Having no common answer means having no effective answer. My prediction is that the only way to find a proper answer to create a common strategy lies with the United States.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear President, Mr Chairman,

What is the relevance and heritage of the 1956 Hungarian revolution? - this is the title of my contribution. Let me answer finally in three sentences. It is always the responsibility of the living that the future generations be provided with the most possible glorious and elevating days in history and the least possible shameful and embarrassing ones. It is always the responsibility and the option of the living to choose between lies and truth. This fight has to be fought at all times and we cannot escape it today either.

Mr President, thank you very much for your kind attention!

*- Verbatim text with minor editing of an audio recording of the speech delivered -*