

Speech of Viktor Orbán at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation

Brussels, 26th January 2017

Dear Friends, distinguished Host and dear Hans-Gert,

I like to be here. I've always respected very much your foundation, which played a very important role in creating freedom and democracy in the Central European countries. And we were educated, well-educated by you, that democracy is based on reasoning. So I am happy to say that after your concept I have different concept on the future, which I would like to present here just today.

What we will do here today is something which is strongly opposed by all the political advisers. Because we will have an open consultation – that is my hope at least – on various difficult issues which belong to the future of the European Union. The situation is complicated – even difficult – and that deserves an open and honest discussion, which is not recommended regularly by political advisers – because it is nice for an academic, intellectual circus, but always dangerous in mass media and communication. But anyway, we don't have other choice. We have to be as much clear and clear-cut to speak about the difficulties we have ahead of us.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, my starting point is that now a new era is knocking on the door of Europe. A new era of political thinking – may I phrase in a way – that, instead of open society, the people would like to have democratic societies. A new era which will think differently on the role and function and mission of the political leadership as such. And a new era which perceives differently what we call geopolitics, or Realpolitik. The question is how Europe and the European Union are ready to accommodate her to this new era. Here we find the first difficulty. This first difficulty is rather psychological, and less political. There is a saying – I'll try to quote it precisely: “whatever exists is possible”. I think this is a number one principle in politics: “whatever exists is possible”. Unfortunately many leaders in Europe do not accept that fact. Let's quote here the economic crisis. It is obvious that in 2008 from our point of view the crisis has a structural character. It does not relate to the waves of the

economy, which regularly go and come. It is not related to that kind of natural phenomena of the world economy: it is structural, which means that we are losing our competitiveness. But many of our leaders' – even in our country anyway, at home – reaction to that is: “You know, it is not structural, there is nothing to be changed dramatically, because it happened several times in the recent decades. There are ups and downs, we are now down but we will be up again”. Or, when we see what is going on in Asia – rising new powers, economic powers, especially China – instead of trying to learn from what is happening there, we invest a considerably amount of energy in explaining that what exists in Asia and in China is not really there. Or if it is, then “It is only temporary and without foundations: this pace of economic development cannot be sustained”. We say that internal tensions of those societies are such that eventually the whole thing will fail politically. So instead of learning and understanding that whatever exists is possible, and this is a new era, we want to explain to ourselves that this is not really the case. I think this is the number one problem we have to cope with, otherwise we cannot find proper answers to the challenges we have ahead of us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the 2008 financial crisis the world economy and world politics experienced a change – what I call paradigm change. And today the success of European countries is measured by how rapidly they have been able to implement this change: which ones responded immediately – we have some; which ones reacted more slowly – we have also some of that; and which ones are still only in the process of waking up – which is the case in the majority of our European Union countries. So after 1990 this paradigm was called “the unipolar world”: the world which was organized around a single centre, a single centre of power; and we lived in this world for 25 years. The world's line of force was arranged in the system around of single centre of power. The essence of the new paradigm now – we are entering just now – is multiple centres of power, all around the world. The necessary consequence of this change of paradigm is that there is no consensus about it: especially among European political leaders, on whether this is a new paradigm or not. We don't have a consensus on that. If you followed the prime ministers' negotiations – quarter after quarter in years, when we have the summit here in Brussels – you can clearly understand that there is no agreement about this new structure of the world's politics. We Hungarians could talk about how a kind of fierce debate could have happened in relation to our economic policy and migrant policy of foreign policy since 2010. I think there is no need to criticize our leaders because of that fierce debate,

because the change of paradigm always necessarily – unavoidably – leads to those kinds of discussions which are going on.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When one speaks at a meeting such as this, the first question to be straightforwardly and openly asked is how to interpret the global situation in which that meeting itself is taking place. Our distinguished host Hans-Gert already referred to the American election and the new president. Obviously this is the decisive element of today's world politics: that there is a new leader of the world's largest military power, the United States. We know his policy, we know what he has proposed, and even now we have some decisions which were done in the recent two or three days.

Despite the fact that we have had Brexit, we have that result of the US presidential election, and we have a result of the referendum in Italy – despite all of this – many people try continually to convince us that there is less to this than meets the eye, and that you cannot possibly bring about the sort of changes that the US president is aiming for. I would like to point out that this is foolish. Whatever exists is possible – and this is true not only of China, but also of the United States. This is high time to take seriously the new president of the United States. Of course it is still early to forecast the changes – their extent and magnitude – which the current shift in the character of the Western world will bring about because of the new leaders in America. Therefore I would advise all of us – myself included – to exercise caution. But with all the attitude of caution, it could be said that there was a historic sentence made clear as the core and heart of the new American policy. And it was not just about what the President said about the United States – “America First” – but that he said: “it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first”. Our host characterised it as a danger. I characterise it as a hope. I am very happy that hypocrisy is over. And now each nation can say that, of course, we all put our nation first. It does not mean war, it does not mean confrontation: it means deals. The question is whether you would like to have war or deals. Clever guys would like to have deals. There is no reason to be afraid of a new era which puts again the nations first, by all the politicians – which are elected, anyway, by their own nations. I think it is good news that now there will be that kind of change of thinking, political thinking, in the future; and the era of the so-called “multilateralism” is at an end, and the era of bilateral relations is upon us. Because this is the core of the changes we will see in the

future, of the coming years. I am sure that the distinction between unipolar and multipolar systems necessarily means that in the world economy a single pole offers a single model, while multiple poles offer multiple models. There is no universal model anymore. Unfortunately our European model is not universal either. Our faith can be – but our political and economic model is not universal. And this is an essential and natural element of the new political era which we are stepping into. One can see that it is very different and difficult to arrange a number of various models into a single system with multilateral agreements. Therefore this new situation means new opportunities emerging for bilateral agreements – including in military policy and in economic policy issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It means – a multipolar world means – that we should take more seriously our policy to China. And we have to understand that it is not a comet, but a fixed star, that will have a determining role in the world economy for many decades at least. And here is Russia. We have Russia, which – let us be honest – has survived Western attempts to isolate it and attempts at regime change. It has survived low oil prices, it has survived sanctions, it has survived the internal activities of NGOs – which can hardly be described as pro-government. It has survived all that. It is therefore unreasonable – and particularly unreasonable here in Europe – to ignore the power and the opportunity that Russia represents. This would naturally require more European self-confidence, and we should be able to honestly claim that we Europeans can defend ourselves militarily, without external assistance. But we don't have the courage to say that, because this is not true. I just would like to observe – and here I apologise for interfering in France's internal affairs – that we have good reason to welcome the fact that a man who was visiting recently Berlin, and who I hope will be the next President of the French Republic, has stated that the most important issue is that of a common European defence alliance. This would be something that could open the way to self-confidence; and after self-confidence – I mean regaining our self-confidence – to the ability to engage in talks as equal partners with everyone – including Russia. And now the time is limited, so I would not like to make comments on India – which could be – silently, anyway – the main winner of the forthcoming several decades in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Going back to Europe, may I say that we are struggling with four major crises at once. We have a growth crisis – more precisely, a competitiveness crisis; we have a demographic crisis; we have a security crisis; and we have a foreign policy crisis. Probably the policy crisis requires some explanations. When I speak about foreign policy crisis, it is illustrated by the simple fact that we Europeans together are unable to exert any – or only minimal – influence whatsoever over events in the regions that directly affect our lives here. Here I could mention Syria, but equally we could mention Ukraine as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Perhaps there is no need for me to quote the figures of the European economy, as you know them better than I do. We lost in the last eight years more than six million jobs. The economic growth in the last decade was only one per cent in the European Union, and less than one per cent in the eurozone. And if I understand correctly, the experts and analysis-makers say the economic growth rate will be no more than one – probably two – per cent in the forthcoming decades in the European Union. This is where we are.

In summary, the European continent is becoming ever weaker: it has been reduced from a global player to a regional player, and soon it will be forced to struggle even for the status of a regional player in foreign policy – and economy, from the growth point, as well. Not to speak about the crisis migrants created in our security and anti-terrorist system.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We cannot avoid the question of how this could happen. There are as many answers as there are people. For my part, I do not demand that anyone accepts my answer, Hans-Gert, as the only possible one – I just would rather contribute to the debate and reasoning on the situation. I do remember well back two decades that Europe set some itself ambitious goals; and, sorry to say, but it has failed to achieve a single one of them. I was prime minister for the first time back in 1998, when we had to make preparations for EU accession. So I have the advantage to remember at that time the heads of governments. Chirac and Helmut Kohl sat with us at the table, and we made grand plans for the euro to become the world's second reserve currency, alongside the dollar. That plan has failed. And we then set out to create a Eurasian economic zone, which, we said, should extend all the way from Lisbon to Vladivostok. That is now

completely off the agenda, so that plan has failed as well. And I do remember that we said that we should create an independent European security policy. That plan has also failed.

So in trying to identify the reasons why we are here where we are, I am not talking about some general decline of Europe, about which we would become involved into a never-ending debate on civilisations. What I am speaking about is the failure to achieve our specific goals set up by ourselves. My explanation is, the reason why we are here is that we do not concentrate on our efforts, we do not concentrate our efforts on goals we set up: but we concentrate on something else. My explanation is that we here became enslaved to a utopia – and the name of that utopia is a supranational Europe. Recently I think many of us realized that this is an illusion. There are no European people: there are only European peoples. And if there are no European people, you cannot build a system of European institutions on the foundations of such a non-existent European people. We have to accept the fact that in Europe there are nations, and a pan-European system can only be built upon the policies, intentions, will and cooperation of the nations. We got all this wrong. In recent times this distinction has been lost. Perhaps those with more experience than me can back up my view that if we look at the European continent's successful periods, we can see that Europe was never strong when it was directed from one single centre of power. We were strong when multiple centres of power existed within Europe. This, I believe, answers the question of how we got to where we are today.

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, we must ask one last question. If things stand as they do, how can we make Europe competitive again? In my view, for Europe to be made competitive it must first abandon the illusion of federalism. We have been walking on the edge, the ground under our feet has run out, and the world's fifth largest economy has just left the European Union. This process will not stop if we carry on like this. From this it follows that Europe itself must also be made multipolar. If you look at what the Visegrád countries are doing in this regard, you can see that we have set exactly that goal for ourselves. From our understanding we contribute in that way to the reform and reinforcement of Europe. As a Hungarian I would like to say also that we are interested to have strong Hungary in a strong European Union.

Another milestone on the road back to competitiveness means to enter into new types of cooperation. First of all, I think we should seek a new arrangement with the United States,

instead of the doomed free trade agreement. We should find an appropriate, a new appropriate form in which the United States and Europe can come to an agreement. I think we should seek opportunities and come to agreements with China, and we should place the issue of Russia back on the agenda. We should try to engage in a process which today can be described as a competition for concluding agreements – a competition which in the past we Europeans have been continually left out of.

And finally I would like to refer to the question of demography, because we have a crisis of demography as well. Naturally I shall give a political answer, which is by nature different from the answer of an economist. In my opinion a nation or a community that is unable to reproduce itself does not deserve to exist, and judgement will be passed on that nation and community on the highest possible place. This problem and this crisis cannot be solved or treated with immigration, with migrants, with guest workers or with cunning tricks, because the problem is spiritually deep-rooted. A community which is unable to sustain itself demographically does not believe in its own future, and therefore there is no place for it in the future. This is also the gravest problem that we have in Hungary now. Our house is on fire, but so too is that of all Europe. I am convinced that if a community seeks assistance and a solution from outside, it must give up its former national identity – in part, or perhaps in full. The reason I dare to use such forthright language on this matter is that we Hungarians are people with extensive experience on this subject: forced relocation, forced settlement, population exchanges, and all their consequences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Back to the starting point – to the question of mine of how we started this consultation today. My summary: things are going now here in Brussels badly. Even the direction has failed. This is the bad news. But there is another side of the coin. The good news is that still we have the chance here in our hands to reform, to change, and make great Europe again. Ironically, our answer could be – to developments in the world, could be only: Make Europe Great Again!

Thank you very much.