

„I have come to talk to you about Europe. “Again”, some might exclaim. People will just have to get used to it, because I will not stop talking about it. Because this is where our battle lies, our history, our identity, our horizon, what protects us and gives us a future.” These are not my words. Emmanuel Macron started his speech at the Sorbonne like this a month ago.

It is now the 4th or 5th time this year we are talking again at another workshop organised by the Hungarian Europe Society about the future of Europe (and tomorrow we will continue).

Let me have four short points as an introduction:

1. Reforming the European Union is on the political agenda again. There is a common feeling that we face a new political momentum in the integration process that should be grasped by liberal, democratic political groups, civil society actors, scholars and citizens at European and national levels. Therefore it is high time to discuss past experience, present challenges, and various scenarios how the European political and economic project might and should develop as a whole. The new and re-newed reform proposals on the table are not so far away from each other. Pro-European stakeholders have a duty to find compromises about the necessary institutional changes and might use smart methods to avoid the creation of a rigid and artificially dividing multi-speed Europe whilst also getting rid of the inertia which would maintain the current status quo.

2. It is especially important to raise alternative ideas in this region, Central Europe, the Eastern part of the European Union. The reinvention of Europe should occur with the active participation of Central Europeans, where trouble-making political forces deny and undermine the concept of a united Europe. Especially in Hungary, we cannot stop talking about the populist-Eurosceptic claim which wants to gain “back” more national sovereignty from the common European level. In fact, under the umbrella of a freedom-fighter rhetoric, the Orbán government has built up an illiberal state inside the European Union. Poland followed the pattern. We still not have clear answers to the problem how such dangerous experiments and practices can be stopped in a member state by the intervention of European

institutions as well through the protest of liberal, democratic political and civil organisations inside and outside these countries. Scape-goating “Brussels”, making enemies from individuals like Soros György, or creating an alternative reality through an on-going mobilisation campaign based on fear that makes terrorists from every refugee, the Hungarian political regime even changed the nature of the political competition - neglecting scrupulousness the lessons of the twentieth century.

3. Although in 2017 we have seen encouraging examples of the come-back of liberal, pro-European politics, the game is not over. At least, at the moment, the the Visegrad Four co-operation as such has not become a fortress of cultural resistance against Western influence. The fight between protagonists of an open society and the combatants of majoritarian/authoritarian political groups for the brain and soul of citizens will continue. Here, in a changing global environment and in a political world dominated by social media interactions the rules of communication have been transformed. For pro-Europeans it is not enough to adjust to the new circumstances, they need to take the lead.

4. To conclude: pro-European thinkers, political actors, civil society representatives can only overcome nationalistic and anti-European ideas coming from the political “dark side” if a leap forward towards deeper European integration succeeds. The forces of the dark side: the term was borrowed from Viktor Orbán’s speech on 23 October celebrating the Hungarian 56 revolution – certainly, he actually meant all of those, who, according him, simply follow the plan of a Hungarian-born billionaire as members of a huge, hidden network. So, let’s show him that this workshop is really able to analyse the state of the union and to elaborate new political concepts at a high intellectual level. I wish us a successful day.