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**“Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society”**

Speech

To be delivered at the Berlin Conference “A Soul for Europe”

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(Check Against Delivery)

The purpose of this conference, as I understand it, is to establish or discover a soul for Europe. I do not think we need to look very far. To my mind, the spirit of Europe is that of an open society and the mission of Europe is to serve as the prototype of a global open society.

Let me explain what I mean.

The concept of open society was first used by the French philosopher Henri Bergson in his book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* published in 1932. One source is tribal and that leads to a closed society whose members feel an affinity for each other and fear or hostility towards the other tribes. By contrast, the other source is universal and it leads to an open society which is guided by universal human rights and seeks to protect and promote the freedom of the individual.

This scheme was modified by the Austrian-born British philosopher, Karl Popper in his seminal book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* published in 1944. He pointed out that open society can be endangered by abstract, universal ideologies like communism and fascism which claim to be in possession of the ultimate truth.

Popper was a philosopher of science and he argued that the ultimate truth is beyond the reach of the human intellect. Even scientific theories cannot be verified beyond doubt; they can be only falsified and it is only the fact that they can be falsified that qualifies them as scientific. We cannot base our decisions on knowledge and our imperfect understanding introduces an element of uncertainty into the world in which we live that is very difficult to cope with. Ideologies like communism and fascism constitute attempts to escape from the uncertainty but they suffer from a fatal flaw: They are bound to be false and misleading exactly because they claim to be in possession of the ultimate truth. As a result, they can be imposed on society only by using various forms of repression and compulsion. By contrast, an open society accepts the uncertainties inherent in our imperfect understanding or fallibility, and establishes laws and institutions which allow people with divergent views and interests to live together in peace. The distinguishing feature of these laws and institutions is that they guarantee the freedom of the individual.

The Second World War resulted in the defeat of the Nazi regime and its ideology. Europe was rebuilt with the generous help of the United States and eventually a process leading to the formation of the European Union was set in motion. The European Union embodies the principles of open society to a remarkable extent although these principles have not been enshrined in a constitution. Even this may be appropriate to an open society because, as Karl Popper argued, our imperfect understanding does not permit permanent and eternally valid definitions of social arrangements. The arrangements must reflect the will of the participants and they must be open to adjustment and improvement. Accordingly, he refused to provide a definition of open society. Nevertheless, the European Union consists of an evolving body of laws and institutions which meet the requirements of an open society. They allow people of divergent views and interests to live together in peace. Only democratic, open societies are allowed to belong to the European Union and no nationality occupies a controlling position.

The European Union was brought into existence by a process of piecemeal social engineering, the method Karl Popper considered appropriate to an open society. The process was directed by a far-sighted and purposeful elite which recognized that perfection is unattainable. It proceeded step by step, setting limited objectives with limited timetables knowing full well that each step will prove to be inadequate and require a further step. The process was helped along first by the threat from the Soviet Union and then by the globalization of the economy which tended to favor larger economic units. That is how the European Union was constructed, one step at a time.

The process has now ground to a halt. The European Constitution, which may have been in any case an overambitious step, was defeated by the referenda held in France and the Netherlands. The Union is left in an untenable condition with an enlarged membership of 27 and a governing structure that was originally designed for 6, although it managed to function for 15. The political will to keep the process moving forward has eroded. The memory of past wars has faded and the threat posed by the Soviet Union has disappeared. The prevailing arrangements are too cumbersome and the dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs is liable to generate political will in the opposite direction. That is indeed what is happening. Nationalist, xenophobic, anti-Muslim sentiments are on the rise almost everywhere, aggravated by the failure to integrate immigrant communities.

The situation is all the more disturbing because the disarray within the European Union is matched by the disarray in the world order. The United States used to be the dominant power in the world. It used to set the agenda for the world. But after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President Bush declared war on terror and that was the wrong agenda executed the wrong way. It was used to invade Iraq. The war on terror undermined the basic principles of American democracy, namely the division of powers, by unduly expanding the powers of the President. It undermined the critical process which is at the heart of an open society by treating any criticism of the President's policies as unpatriotic and it was this suspension of a critical process that allowed the President to invade Iraq. But worst of all, the war on terror was counterproductive. It increased the terrorist threat by creating innocent victims and it led to a precipitous decline in American power and influence. As a result, the United States is no longer in a position to set the agenda of the

world. There are other players who have their own agenda – Iran, North Korea, Russia and Venezuela to mention only the most conspicuous. The United States is no longer able to project overwhelming military power in any part of the world as it was when President Bush announced the Bush doctrine, and as a result the world order has become much less stable. Indeed, it is threatening to descend into world disorder.

The proper role for the United States would be to lead the world in a cooperative effort to deal with the problems that confront humanity and can be dealt with only by greater international cooperation – such as the threats posed by rogue regimes, the breakdown of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, climate change and the need to maintain stability in the global economic system and reduce poverty.

In the past, the United States served as the leader of the free world. The United States was just as dominant at the end of the Second World War as it was after the collapse of the Soviet empire. But then the United States used its leadership to establish the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions and to engage in The Marshall Plan. That is what made America great. The Bush doctrine and the war on terror was a sharp break with the American tradition. It left the world leaderless and the world is in disarray.

The European Union cannot possibly take the place of the United States as the leader of the world. But it can set an example for the world in international cooperation both within its own borders and beyond. The European Union has already set a good example both by member states delegating some aspects of their sovereignty and by offering membership to other states. The prospect of membership has been the most powerful tool in turning candidate countries into open societies. As a result, the European Union has already been serving as an inspiring example although most people in the European Union do not realize it. All that is needed now is for the people of Europe to be inspired by the idea of the European Union as the prototype of a global open society.

What this means in practice requires further elaboration. What it means in principle can be stated very clearly and concisely. The European Union needs to have a common foreign policy. That is the one part of the European constitution that urgently needs to be rescued.

In the meantime, the absence of institutional reform should not be allowed to serve as a pretext for inaction.

The European Union already possesses ample resources to make an impact on the world stage:

- half of the world's overseas development assistance;
- the biggest single market in the world;
- 45,000 diplomats;
- almost 100,000 peace-keepers serving in every continent;
- and the prospect of using trade, aid and the prize of membership as catalysts to encourage neighboring states to become open societies.

Where Europe has a common policy – such as on Iran – it has succeeded in persuading others, including the United States, to change their long-held positions. But all too often the European Union fails to live up to its potential. Let me cite a few examples.

Europe has made little progress in formulating a common energy policy. As a result it is increasingly dependent on Russia and Russia has not hesitated to exploit its bargaining position. The EU has failed to give adequate support to Georgia or to impose adequate sanctions on Uzbekistan for the massacre of Andijon. The European Neighborhood Policy never gathered any momentum and the treatment of Turkey is pushing an important ally into the wrong direction.

There is also trouble brewing in some of the newly admitted member countries like Hungary and Poland and the EU could take a more proactive role in keeping those countries on track.

Needless to say, a common European Union foreign policy should not be anti-American. Such a posture would be self-defeating because it would reinforce the division of the international community that the Bush administration has initiated. I am speaking about the European Union setting an example in international cooperation that eventually the United States under a different leadership – which is bound to come – would emulate.

A global open society emphatically does not mean global government. Government inevitably interferes with the freedom of the individual. A global government could not avoid being repressive even if it were built on liberal principles. A global open society could not even be as closely integrated as the European Union because the affinity among the member states would be less pronounced.

What a global open society does stand for is the rule of law on an international scale. According to the neoconservatives who have exercised such a nefarious influence within the Bush administration, international relations are relations of power, not law. According to them, international law merely ratifies what military power has accomplished. To some extent that is true today. For instance, the United Nations has ratified the occupation of Iraq which has been brought about in an illegitimate way. But it ought not to be true tomorrow. International relations, including the exercise of military power, ought to be governed by international law more effectively than it is today. This can be achieved only if those who are in control of military power abide by international law.

Europe as the prototype of a global open society is an abstract idea. Whether it is strong enough, persuasive enough, to serve as the unifying force guiding the European Union forward, remains to be seen. One thing is certain, the process that has carried the European Union forward so far cannot be revived in the same form as before. It was driven by an elite and the population at large has felt left out. This cannot continue if for no other reason than on account of the referenda that are used with increasing frequency. A referendum expresses the people's will in a raw, capricious form without the

intermediation of an elite. Therefore, if the European Union is to revive it has to be by popular demand. One way or another, civil society has to be mobilized. How that can be done ought to be the subject of discussion at this conference.

Speaking for myself, I can say that the idea of Europe as a prototype for a global open society is certainly inspiring enough. Although I am not a European citizen, I am a believer in the open society. I have a network of foundations inside and outside the European Union committed to promoting that idea and I am ready to support an Open Society Initiative for Europe. Such an initiative would combine high quality research with advocacy and it would try to mobilize civil society behind the idea of Europe as a model and a force for a global open society. I have had a very positive response from practically everyone I have talked to so far and I hope that you and the foundations sponsoring this conference will also join this effort. The world badly needs it.

Thank you.