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"The Coppet Spirit and the Soul of Europe"

Conference sur l'Europe des Communes dans l'esprit de Coppet
Le Group de Coppet

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Dear Mr. Syndic

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for the invitation to speak to you today. I have always considered it as a great gift that at some point in my life Europe became my professional preoccupation - first as Polish Minister responsible for accession of Poland to the European Union, and as the first and the second Polish EU Commissioner, and now as a Member of the European Parliament from Warsaw. I have always been what Madame de Stael would term an "enthusiast" of Europe but before 1989, separated by the Iron Curtain, we could not participate in building the European Community. But we always yearned for Europe and we did what best we could not to lose the contact with the culture of Europe – we read books of philosophy and literature, and the European ideals that we found in our readings somehow had to coexist with our everyday reality that was far from them.

But then, the „Year of miracles”, 1989, arrived, that made possible the membership of Poland and seven other central European countries in the European Union in 2004. The pro-European enthusiasm has found its way of expressing itself in the new reality. After the accession we saw that Europe brings the civilizational advancement, democratic institutions, civic participation, that it makes possible building a peaceful community and the pursuit of personal happiness stemming from the freedom of choice.

Before Poland and other central European countries joined the EU, the Union had been through two important discussions: one about the „deficit of democracy” and the other: about the ‘soul for Europe”. Although there never was an explicit link made between these two streams of the debate, there was no denying a certain connection between them. Entering the period of maturity the Union started to re-think its spiritual heritage and to look for new sources for renewal of its strength. It began to be more and more clear that European single market fundamentally important as it is, with its four freedoms, clearly the top achievement of integration and common standards deepening economic integration by itself, would not make Europe a happy place.

When Jacques Delors issued his challenge to his contemporaries and the succeeding generation of leaders to find „a heart and soul for Europe’ , he clearly understood that in order to survive and thrive in the global arena, our continent had to create a certain spirituality of its own. A spirituality that is born out of a common pursuit of democratic excellence, of a joy of creating a harmonious society by people with open minds and warm hearts toward their fellow citizens. Europe of technocracy and pragmatism, important as it is, was not enough. Poetry was as important in the long-run to grow people’s allegiance to the European project. Here, a very pragmatic President of the European Commission could have been in fact the son of Madame de Stael, who once stated „ I learn life from the poets”. And, actually, this combination of poetry and pragmatism was quite common to the first generations of those who brought the dream of a united Europe to life. Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, and later Jacques Delors and others succeeded because they did not follow their interests, but they followed their hearts. It is in their hearts that the dream of a new peaceful and cooperating Europe was born. Again, Madame de Stael was, perhaps unwittingly, their guide in this enterprise . „In matters of heart nothing is true except the improbable” – was one of her sayings. When the political, moral and spiritual edifice of first the European Community and then the European Union was built, it was for everybody to see that improbable became true. A continent of war became the most peaceful place in the world, a continent of imperial competition became a place of vanishing borders. A continent where some people were willing to die for their self-proclaimed war leaders, became a place where they began to trust themselves and their common spirit of cooperation and collective wisdom.

Let me quote Madame de Stael again: "The greatest happiness is to transform one's feelings into action". In modern European history, the European Union, despite all its compromises, is a prime example of working mechanism that every day makes such a transformation: a common currency, a cohesion policy, an extended Schengen area, countless Erasmus-like programs for increasing mobility among youth and many others – there is no doubt that over the years those particular features of „Europe on the move“ have brought a lot of happiness to increasing number of people all over the continent – not only from the EU member states.

Until not so long, happiness was not exactly a word from the political vocabulary (with the exception of the American Declaration of Independence). But more and more we notice that happiness of individuals and communities, is an indispensable part of human and social capital that we need to create in order to successfully compete with the rest of the world. It is not only the matter of crude sociological observation that a happier person makes a happier worker, a happier producer. It is something much deeper than that.

The knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy can only reach its full potential in society based on subsidiarity and participation, where the dignity of all persons, men and women, is respected, where the talents are encouraged to grow from an earliest age, through systematic education and visibility of role models for young people, and where the diversity in all its forms is supported by extended networks of public and private partnerships in all spheres of life.

We live in an age of globalization. We see it and feel it not only in metropolitan areas, in big cities. Globalization reaches everywhere: it is to be found in Geneva but also in Coppet. One of the most interesting observers of globalizing processes, Thomas Friedmann, wrote a book with the title „The World is Flat“. Flatness means that the geographical distances are shorter, but also that the ways in which we all live are less hierarchical, that working tasks are more spread out among many people, and that many networks emerge every day all around us. Our learning processes, absorbing new information and finding new, better solutions to more complex problems are faster and more collective in nature. We understand that the complexity

of modern living can be tackled effectively only through integrated approaches to various issues. And those integrated approaches are the most effective, I dare say, on the local level. Challenges like climate change, energy efficiency, changing employment patterns have direct consequences for the living standards and the feeling of security of local communities in every country. This impact may differ, in form and force, in Switzerland and in Poland, for example – due to differences in wealth and social fabric – but it is there. Thus for practitioners and observers of local politics it is obvious that sub-national levels of governance become increasingly relevant for public interventions. This has been reflected already for quite some time in growing share of public investment at local level. It has been proven by the EU experience that local and regional public interventions are often decisive in search for dynamism and change, for promoting creativity and innovation, for creation of type of jobs suitable for emerging market trends, for increase in energy efficiency, and finally for building the social capital by bringing different actors from business, academia, education and the arts, together for the goal of "good growth". It is a growth that combines the drive for competition and increased productivity with the tailored policies directed toward tapping into existing social skills of the local population and creating an ongoing social exchange of goods and capital, but also of social practices. This can strengthen the resilience mechanisms helping people to withstand potential crises. "Good growth" can have the best chance to develop and thrive in the specific environment of the multilevel governance.

We live the time of a grand transformation. There are new expectations of consumers. There are new markets emerging. Jobs are created in new sectors. Society is aging with all the consequences for public finance, labour market policy, migration policy and new demands. Moving toward low carbon economy implies huge structural transformation. All changes will have dramatic impacts on our society, on social fabric, on social capital. There is a big risk that social cohesion, this magic glue will suffer.

We have talked for decades about the link between diversity and unity in Europe. This time talk is not enough. The time has come when we must prove that we are able to truly build on this diversity and cooperation. That means that any new strategy for Europe must be built on the role of an active citizen and an involved society.

Regional and local levels of European governance are important co-owners of Europe, capable to harness policy tools they have at their disposal, to harness enthusiasm of all partners: business, academia, civil society. And to translate general goals into their own territorial specificities.

Both, innovation that can bring productivity gains, and greening, that can create new demands and markets, they both require local and regional focus. They require public interventions working as catalysts and multipliers. They require inter-connected investments. This kind of investment coherence can be provided only by a place based integrated approach to investment and growth policies. A region, a city, a town, a rural area happens usually to be such a place where all partners needed to bring about a solution can be found and all elements of a solution can be brought together.

Europe's tasks must be shared between European, national, regional and local levels in a well orchestrated way.

Multilevel governance is socially inclusive for it involves various segments of civil society in the political process. It is also socially sensitive for it is combating the temptation of alienation of certain groups. In the situation defined by globalization, the old sectoral approach to public intervention is always too little and too late. Only the holistic model of public policy passes the stress test of good governance, because it eliminates the dangers of the fragmentation in decision-making and possible lack of support when the decision is reached. It also makes it possible for local authorities and civil society to cope better with specific problems that derive from geographic handicaps or the lack of „economy of scale”.

Already today political, economic and social powers and responsibilities are increasingly being spread between all different levels of governance. Globalization and many other challenges (climate change, energy security and efficiency, demography) encourage authorities at different level to make decisions collectively. Hierarchical or top down approach is disappearing from good practises of governance. This is a result of growing complexity of development issues that can be

tackled effectively only through an integrated approach. Also, our citizens expect from authorities who are around the corner effective local actions in response to local impacts of global challenges. Sub national levels of governance become increasingly relevant for public interventions. This has been reflected already for quite some time in growing size of public investment at local level. In the current global context, there is clearly a need to seek actively new development opportunities at local and regional level.

The multi-level governance is the wave of the future, because it coincides with the democratic impulse through its natural drive toward decentralization and spreading out the responsibility for sharing competences and obligations. As such it is thus the best expression of the subsidiarity principle – one of the cornerstones of the European Union.

But obviously subsidiarity it is not something exclusively owned by the EU. Here, in Switzerland, the value of subsidiarity is understood especially well. The system of „Helvetic democracy” is a model example of subsidiarity-based decision-making patterns concerning both local and national issues. It is no wonder that the Circle of Coppet formed itself here, in an environment that encourages local experiences with diversity and decentralization within the framework of equality of all citizens. But it has even deeper historical roots. In the „Manifesto of the Europe of Coppet” you recall those roots and make them relevant not only for this day but also for the future. It is wonderful to see that some contemporary inventions in terms of multilevel governance, of which I spoke, can be traced to the „Tuscany model” of local autonomy and municipal democracy in late Medieval times. It gives us a blessed assurance that we indeed do not reinvent the wheel, but just make it go faster!

Diversity of local cultures, languages, regional specificity is something that I have always advocated and worked for, both in my capacity as EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, and as Chair of the Committee of Regional Development in the European Parliament. I am happy that I have found many allies in this work, among the local and regional authorities, business communities, scientists and planners involved with development of particular localities, regions and municipalities, large and small.

It is my special pleasure that I have found a special ally in the Coppet Circle. Your main lines of thinking and activity concentrate around the five themes – let me spell them out: the reinforcement of the role of localities in the construction of Europe; the leadership role of the civil society; putting science, research and culture at the heart of the European construction; promoting the small business sector and the innovation, with a special accent on the role of women in business, and finally, inclusion of young generation in building a New Europe.

Let me say something about it. I have a feeling that those objectives were not chosen at random. I think that you chose them consciously. Civil society leaders, innovators, scientists and researchers, creative people in the arts, active women, mobile youth, small businesses – up until not so long ago they formed the largest pool of underused potential. Now with the turn toward an innovation-driven society, supported by a knowledge-based economy, out of a sudden those groups representing to a certain extent unused development potential, became a driving force for social progress, democratic mobility, innovation and a vital resource of moral revitalization of society.

In fact, in this new type of society, we have to redefine somewhat the notion of „innovation” itself. Innovation”, „innovative approaches” do not equal technology, or material production only. Those terms ought to refer in an equal degree to the ability to form new patterns of cooperation in society, to doing something for the cause of intergenerational solidarity, to working for creation of a vibrant civil society and a „life-forming” and „life-advancing” environment. In other words, social innovation should be treated on pair with technological innovation. In its most technical aspect, innovation should form a life-supporting system for the growing sectors of our economy connected with the incoming demographic changes and the demands of sustainable growth. In the new economy of the XXI century labour market, life-learning education, social services and domestic arrangements are no longer separate entities – they should be mutually supporting each other in a virtuous circle. Both technological and social innovations should feed off each other with constant information feedbacks and resource exchange. For this purpose, we ought to take up innovative concepts like clusters and think how they could be used for building the

world-class project of social and cultural infrastructure, like education for all age groups, care for the elderly, urban youth apprenticeship or even literacy projects, etc. This is the way in which local, often underfunded, geographically scattered projects could become a part of a European-wide network of „clusters of hope”. If we want to achieve progress, in economic, political, but also cultural and civilizational terms, then supporting these „clusters’ is not an option, but a necessity.

That the Circle of Coppet has noticed this development is indeed a proof of your forward-looking thinking. It is difficult indeed, at least for myself, to imagine Europe playing an important role in the global arena of competition and cooperation without using all its resources, both human and material.

There is a lot of work to be done in Europe. The crisis has challenged us all at a time when we have been already in the midst of adapting ourselves to globalization and the need to turn our economies and the way of life away from fossil fuels and towards a more sustainable model. In front of all the challenges entire Europe, including the local and regional one must act swiftly and decisively, and let me emphasize – with a high degree of urgency.

When we talk about human resources, we go back to the issue of the „soul of Europe”. Let me say a few words on that at the end of my speech.

We live in difficult time, time of uncertainty, when contradictory forces are stalking their claim to a soul of Europe. The forces of unity, cooperation, coexistence on one hand – and the forces of intolerance, discrimination, even hate on the other. All those for whom Europe is a project of their lifetime, worthy of devoting to it a large portion of their time, dedication and even love, should join together in order to contain the rise of the nationalist, populist sentiment that threatens the basic European values: peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The Coppet model could become a bulwark against those deplorable tendencies and an active advocate of humanistic values. Europe as envisioned in the Coppet model would be a continent of locality but not localism and a complex structure of extended

networks of communities that do not give in to the temptation of communitarianism. It is a really thin line to walk through – it requires all the subtlety that can be mustered in thought, speech and action. Fortified by the philosophical ideals and rich heritage of Madame de Stael and Benjamin Constant and their circle of friends, collaborators and followers, the Circle of Coppet can become, together with those who believe in the same ideals, a beacon of hope and a herold of change for Europe of the future.

Thank you for your kind attention.