

Speech of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the conference

„Christian response to the challenges facing Europe”

April 15, 2013. Bilbao

(Edited version)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The title of my speech is “Christian response to the challenges facing Europe”. Perhaps there are some who think that I want to talk about the actual problems weighing down on Europe today: economic crisis, unemployment, demographic problems, migration and ethnic problems, violence, energy dependence, environment and climate change. We could discuss each of these from a Christian perspective as well. It would even be exciting, but I do think that there is something in particular, which is the root cause of this crisis, from where all of our problems – including the economic and financial crisis – really stems. My feeling is that until we are able to find an answer to this fundamental problem, we will only be able to provide symptomatic treatment to other crisis factors as well. Therefore today I would like to talk about the main challenge that – I think – Europe is facing.

First, I would like to discuss the situation in Europe. Then I would like to talk about how we got here. After this, I would like to discuss how we can come out of this situation and finally what we Christians and Christian politicians should be doing.

I am a politician; therefore I would not like to argue on religious or theological grounds, but instead look at things from a social, cultural and political perspective. There is a difficult question here: dare I articulate an opinion on such a difficult issue? I have been involved in politics for over thirty years now. I first participated in the underground, illegal organizations fighting against communism. We founded an anti-communist, opposition movement in 1988. The first free elections in Hungary were held in 1990, where I became a Member of Parliament at the age of 27. We won the election in 1998 and I could form government as Prime Minister at the age 35. I lead most of Hungary’s European Union accession talks with Brussels. We lost the elections in 2002 and were in opposition during socialist governments for eight years, then we returned after eight years by obtaining more than two-thirds of the

seats in Parliament. In 2011, Hungary held the rotating presidency of the European Union, a work which I have led. Taken together, these would seem to constitute enough grounds for me to dare to speak on some issues related to the European Union not from theory but from experience, the way I know European politics to be.

We have all read in the news that Europe has lost most of its economic competitiveness. Others are stronger, they are developing faster and they are more competitive than we are. This has happened before, and it could happen to anybody. The real question is how did this crisis erupt so suddenly? Why did we not stop the process earlier, why didn't anybody stop indebtedness? Why didn't anybody say that things were going in the wrong direction? Where were our leaders when someone should have stopped this trend, prepared us, made us adapt to the changing world? Why is it, that all these troubles have hit families and countries, have shattered families' standards of living, in fact, the standards of living of millions of families and why is it that planned adaptation never happened?

There is a series of questions that need to be clarified here. Is it all right for a politician to talk about the relationship between the economic crisis and Christianity, would it not be better to leave such issues to scholars, philosophers or theologians?

I have my own ideas in this respect. I am convinced that people committed to Christianity, clerics, laymen, Catholics and Protestants are connected by a shared sentiment: the guardian's responsibility. We read in the Book of Ezekiel that if the guardian sees the armed enemy approaching, but does not sound the alarm, and does not warn the people of the impending threat then God will make him responsible for the lives lost. My conviction is that the religious and laymen leaders of Europe are such guardians, whose responsibility is to talk to people about what they see as threats and problems. This is why I dare to speak on this topic today.

The basic assumption for my speech, being fully aware of my responsibility, is that the economic and financial crisis taking place in Europe is not a coincidence and is not a problem that can be rectified by a few skilled technocrats, financial and economic professionals. My starting point is that the financial and economic crisis is the consequence of policies which

have been present on the continent for a long time now. What do I hear dear inhabitants of Bilbao if I listen to Brussels executives or the Prime Ministers of numerous European countries? To summarize and simplify my experience: the majority of them think that the cohabitation of people in Europe should exclusively be planned according to economic rules. They think that the economy, the market and its life material – money – are the main sources of rationality, that the rationality of the economy and the market cannot be questioned. They think in Brussels that market logic can be used to remedy every ailment of society. They also think that if there are any problems in the economy, in the market economy, if there is any disorder, then the market will be able to correct itself and return to its former state of equilibrium. Anybody questioning these dogmas will be called irrational, a reactionary, and frequently: a dinosaur. The way of thinking supporting the supremacy of the economy has created its own political counterpart. The political version of market supremacy is liberal individualism. I am not sure if this is the most precise category, but perhaps you understand what I am referring to. The assumption that if there is no such thing as common good, if “bonum publicum” does not exist, then only individual interests will prevail. Only private economic motivations and considerations will matter. Other impulses belonging to human life, like religion, national pride, family bonds do not matter when compared with personal economic interests. This culture and politics has developed its own way of expressions, its themes, its vocabulary and reasoning. This is the language of moral relativism. There are no unchangeable truths; everything depends on your perspective.

What is it that we do not hear when we listen to European politicians? What are the words we will not hear? We will not hear words like honour, pride, commitment, obligation, nation, patriotism, resolve, greatness, valour, justice – we do not hear these concepts at all. It is as if these words had never existed. I am of the opinion that there is an aggressive secular political vision prevailing in European politics today called progressivism. Progressives think that this future is desirable for Europeans today: we are going from the religious towards the religionless, from the national to the supranational, from the family towards the individual. Those who today are in majority in Brussels are those who not only subscribe to this worldview, but also want this to be maintained. In reality they are thinking about and working on a Godless society. Their concept of religion is that it is merely an accessory of one’s lifestyle. They think that everybody is entitled to their own faith but that faith should have no ramifications on government, economy or European politics.

I do not know if you feel the impact of this culture here in Basque Country, but we do feel it in Hungary. If you think about the situation of the other continents, like North America, South America, Asia or Africa then you will notice a strange phenomenon. There is only one single continent, where political leaders or at least the majority of them insist that Man is capable of organizing the world without God and God's laws. Today this is a European idea. The United States of America belongs to the West, but leaders there would not dare to present this idea in public. At the same time, it is inconceivable in the world of Islam and even in India, people would be surprised if somebody wanted to talk them out of the social lessons that can be drawn from the teachings of the Hindu religion.

I think therefore that nowadays, European politics is living with two delusions. The first one is that Christianity did not play a decisive role in the evolution of Europe. When we debated the basic treaty of Europe, we wanted to explicitly refer to Christianity among the foundational ideas of Europe, but we were voted down. It was not simply forgotten at the time! We have debated this and it was then purposefully left out. The other delusion Ladies and Gentlemen is the idea that Western values and institutions can be maintained without Christian moral principles.

Let us see the consequences of these delusions. Usually philosophers agree about two things when it comes to human societies; that civilizations are built on two main resources: human creativity and a sense of permanence. Permanence means that people can be sure that there are certain values, that never change. These help to decide what is good and what is bad, what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong.

If we look at Europe, then we will see that Europe has neglected both of its resources. It tried to substitute work and value creation with financial speculation and loans, whereas permanence was replaced by relativism. The East is today more competitive than we are because it appreciates both of the aforementioned civilizational resources more than we do, it respects work more than we do, and respects its own cultural traditions far more than Europe does. In addition, if what is and isn't valuable begins to be questioned, then the dignity of the other resource, the value creation of human creativity will also diminish. This means that if we give up on the permanent values of our civilization, then human performance will also

decline. This is what happened to us in Europe and this is why we started to be ashamed of our Christian roots and started to neglect them along with our moral and cultural traditions while we were erecting our European structures. We have come to a point where forms and notions of human relations as *the nation* and *the family* have started to become questionable. The original meaning of *work* and *loans* have also become uncertain in economic life. This means that important things – work, loans, family and nation – still exist but have become disengaged from the moral foundations that Christianity has provided for them.

Perhaps a Europe representing Christian values would not have allowed people to consume the future of their families with unsecured loans. A Europe representing Christian values would perhaps have been aware that every single euro that we take out in loans must be earned. A Europe representing Christian values would rather lend to people who are expected to be willing to work for the money they borrow. A Europe representing Christian values would not have allowed whole countries to sink into debt bondage. A Europe representing Christian values would perhaps have promoted policies that ensure a more equitable division of burdens. Instead, what do we see? If a government in Europe is forced to take loans from a European or a global institution, then it is also forced to enforce measures which discredit that government in the eyes of its own voters. Austerity measures follow and this is neither in the interest of governments nor in the interest of the creditors in the long term. Because if order is disrupted due to the series of austerity measures and stability is lost and the framework of economic life becomes unstable, who will then work to repay the euro loans?

It is important, that when I talk about Christianity and the Christian foundation of Europe, I am not speaking about one's personal religion. That is also important. I am speaking from another aspect, a societal aspect and my statement is the following: Europeans will not be able to get Christianity out of their minds. They will not be able to forget the biblical story, the story of redemption. We might have different approaches to the story and its actors, we might interpret it differently, we might even think that it is a fictional story, but there is one thing that cannot be done and will hardly happen in Europe: we cannot act as if the story never existed, as if it never was at work in us, Europeans.

For us, Europeans, the story of Christianity and its moral relevance is our main civilizational resource. The main resource of the Arab world is Islam, for the Asian world it is Buddhism

and the Hindu religion. Christian culture, tradition and religion is the main resource of Western civilization, regardless of the type of relationship we establish with the Creator. A European cannot cast his Christian skin. This should also be understood in Brussels. It does not make sense to push for a new, common European identity that rejects the fundamental fact, that the moral framework of European life is provided by the biblical story. As long as it is proclaimed that we are seeking some new identity for ourselves, as long as attempts are made to use astute reasoning to leave the fact that we belong to Christianity out of the definition of Europe, as long as there are politicians calling for this, our continent will continue to flounder in a permanent state of self-denial.

Let me give you a few, seemingly evident examples to demonstrate how civilizational threats and the disregard for Christian teachings are related. If we can steal using banking manipulations, then why should we persecute a pickpocket? If we can allow speculators to become rich by bankrupting a company or a whole country, then why are we imprisoning swindlers and frauds? If we consider it legal that a bank is allowed to flourish at the detriment of others, if we allow anybody to earn money by speculating on the downfall of a whole country and to destroy millions of people, then what moral grounds do we have to punish bank robbers? If Europe believes that the family is an outdated institution, then why are we surprised that there are less and less children born, that less and less workers have to provide for the pensions of the elderly or that labour has to be imported into Europe from other continents, which leads to serious problems?

The situation today is that Europeans are incapable even of biological self-preservation. Let me finally say a few words about what we can still hope for. Our Christian identity also means – and this is the good news – that we have a chance for renewal. We do have a common cultural and moral community. We have a strong foundation to build on. Thus we do not have to seek new intellectual foundations for the renewal of Europe. We need to build on the old foundations in a modern way in European politics, in order to develop concrete economic and political solutions to manage the crisis.

I am convinced that Christianity is an exciting, living and inspiring heritage. Christianity has managed to place the most exciting dilemma of the life of Europeans' into focus. The most

important value for Europeans is freedom. It is exactly the constantly changing order and regulations surrounding freedom and rules restricting freedom that provide us with a dramatic tension which makes the story of European Christian culture so interesting from the beginnings up until today. Is there any force that restricts freedom? If it does exist, then where are the limits, based on which a new generation may define its own life? If we want to come out of the crisis and we want to close this era, then we, contemporary Europeans, have to respond by defining the guarantees and the limits of freedom in the future, in other words we need to find out how we want to define the common national and European good. What I do know is that we must speak about protection of the family and of life; we must elevate unconditional respect for human dignity to the level of common good. Financial capital and speculation have to be reregulated to serve the public interest. We have to strengthen the honour of work, of productive work. There are different national variations of such policies. It is evident that different measures are needed in Sweden, Spain, in the Netherlands or even in Hungary for that matter. This is why Brussels will have to respect nations much more in the future.

The question now is if Christians will accept the order of freedom, this European order, as an opportunity - or if they will instead consider it more of a threat. I would propose to Christians, to European Christian Democrats that we should look at the Europe of freedom and the order of freedom as an opportunity. Truth cannot be dictated, the truth can only be confessed. Tyranny may be able to exist without faith, but freedom cannot. Truth is best confessed in the free world in the free European culture. Therefore we should never stand on the side of state-sponsored violence and uniformity dictated by the state, we should instead stand by the idea of a free society. We have to trust that our words are persuasive enough and that our truth is suitable for us build the European community on this foundation.

We need self-confidence: we need political assertiveness and a self-confident Christian political stance. Our community is held together by the idea that we are all part of a universal story. Everyone can find themselves in this story, everyone can find their own stories and can expect to receive assistance in their decisions, everyone can see the misleading paths and the

consequences of good and bad decisions. This is also true for politics, for people active in public life, for the movement and for parties as well.

Participation in the political battle is a difficult issue for Christians, it raises serious dilemmas. I say that we should not shy away from these tough questions. We have to reconcile the representation of the truth with the idea of securing a majority in countries and on a continent where we cannot be sure if the majority of Europeans still consider themselves Christians. If we only secure the majority, that is we gain power, but do not represent the truth, as we Christians define it, then why have power? If we do represent the truth, but cannot obtain or preserve our majority, then our truth will be in vain if we cannot use it to the benefit of our nation. We are not Christian political kamikaze fighters, we are responsible political leaders, who need the truth and the majority at the same time in order to realize our ideas. Meanwhile, we have to know that beside the truth and the majority, even if we are able to reconcile them, we will not be able to achieve perfection in this world, because we are only humans. Therefore the point of departure for Christian politics cannot be anything other than humility, modesty and sober realism.

The times in which we live and the way that we live threatens with the great spiritual danger of getting completely lost in our petty everyday problems, in our struggle for survival. We risk missing the wood for the trees. I am convinced that Christianity can lift us from this sense of being lost, this sense of feeling abandoned, and Christianity can place us in a frame of reference, which provides the magnificence of every spiritual and national community. A poet once wrote the following: “What has happened to you Man, why are you so desperate? The Lord will forgive you for everything, except your despair. ”

A clerical leader was asked several centuries ago, what he would do, if he was told that the world would come to an end on the next day? His response was the following: I would plant an apple tree today. However adverse the situation today in European politics, whatever advantages our adversaries should enjoy today in Brussels, it is this relationship, this understanding, and this spiritual state that can provide courage and self-confidence for European Christian politics.

Schumann said and today we know he was right: Europe would either be Christian or it will not exist. I think this is the only good response to the 21st century challenges facing Europe.