

Address

by

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This unofficial translation is made available in response to great interest from participants. An official version is in preparation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For many years, decades in fact, the West was defined against the background of the communist world. As a common enemy and a common threat, it was this communist world that kept the West united both politically, and in terms of security arrangements. Against its will, it also helped the West strengthen, cultivate and develop its time-tested principles and practices, like civil society, parliamentary democracy, the market economy, and the concept of human and civil rights. Confronted by the gloomy, dangerous and expansionist world of communist totalitarianism, the West was continually required to prove its commitment to freedom, truth, democracy, broader cooperation and growing prosperity. In other words, the communist world was instrumental in the West's own self-affirmation.

Yet in a way, it was a rather equivocal self-affirmation. There was something soothing about it. While stimulating many good things, it also led Western politics to unwittingly embrace certain stereotypes, that grew from a feeling that its own status was beyond question. The "non-time" and "non-history" of the totalitarian regimes infected the West as well. The West became too used to the bipolar division of the world into blocs based on power and ideology. It became too used to the status quo of the Cold War, to nuclear peace, and to things staying pretty much the way they were.

As the Eighties became the Nineties, the whole Second World, as it used to be known, exploded and, in a rather frenzied fashion, collapsed in upon itself. In its place, a crater has suddenly opened up before the eyes of an astonished world, one that is now spewing forth a lava of post-communist surprises. Mixed up in this lava, we will find a long-forgotten history coming back to haunt us, a history full of thousands of economic, social, ethical, ethnic, territorial, cultural and political problems that remained latent and unnoticed under the surface of totalitarian boredom.

As far as I can tell, this explosion astonished the West as much as it did the East. In a way, it has put Western policy-making in a state of shock. Every day, we see evidence of how difficult it is for the West to respond and adjust to the new reality, to break itself of established habits. The West feels that everything has changed, but it does not know exactly what to do about it. We have even begun to hear expressions of nostalgia for the days when the world was easier to understand. How can we deal with all these new states that have broken away from the older systems of order forged in Helsinki, Yalta and Versailles? How are we to respond to the demise of centralized economies and the threat of economic and social crises that go along with it? What are

we to do about the regional conflicts, actual or potential, the eruptions of ethnic passions and hatreds? How will we cope with the geopolitical changes -- so difficult to foresee -- that will result from these developments?

Not only is the West somewhat confused by these tremors in the East; it is beginning to shake a little itself, and the structure of its former certainties is beginning to come loose. A broad range of geopolitical interests, rivalries and ambitions, dormant until recently, are now coming back to life. Alliances unquestioned until recently are now being called in doubt, because the pressures that once made them necessary are disappearing. Particular interests buried by history are suddenly emerging and clashing with each other. There are even signs, here and there, of the temptation to exploit the end of the divided world to create new divisions.

In a word, the end of communism took us all by surprise.

But we all know and understand this by now, at least to a certain extent. With your permission, I would like to talk about another aspect of these developments, one that is less visible, yet more profound and substantial. It is an aspect of the matter that, to my knowledge, has not yet made the front pages.

The end of communism is, first and foremost, a message to the human race. It is a message we have not yet fully deciphered and comprehended.

In its deepest sense, the end of communism has, I believe, brought a major era in human history to an end. It has brought an end not just to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but to the modern age as a whole.

The modern era has been dominated by the culminating belief, expressed in different forms, that the world -- and Being as such -- is a wholly knowable system governed by a finite number of universal laws that man can grasp and rationally direct for his own benefit. This era, beginning in the Renaissance and developing from the Enlightenment to socialism, from positivism to scientism, from the industrial revolution to the information revolution, was characterized by rapid advances in rational, cognitive thinking. This, in turn, gave rise to the proud belief that man, as the pinnacle of everything that exists, was capable of objectively describing, explaining and controlling everything that exists, and of possessing the one and only truth about the world. It was an era in which there was a cult of depersonalized objectivity, an era in which objective knowledge was amassed and technologically exploited, an era of belief in automatic progress brokered by the scientific method. It was an era of systems, institutions, mechanisms, and statistical averages. It was an era of freely transferrable, existentially ungrounded information. It was an era of ideologies, doctrines, interpretations of reality, an era where the goal was to find a universal theory of the world, and thus a universal key to unlock its prosperity.

* Communism was the perverse extreme of this trend. It was an attempt, on the basis of a few propositions masquerading as the only scientific truth, to organize all of life according to a single model, and to subject it to central planning and control regardless of whether or not that was what life wanted.

The fall of communism can be regarded as a sign that modern thought -- based on the premise that the world is objectively knowable, and that the knowledge so obtained can be absolutely generalized -- has come to a final crisis. This era has created the first global, or planetary, technical civilization, but it has reached the limit of its potential, the point beyond which the abyss begins. I think the end of communism is a serious warning to all mankind. It is a signal that the era of arrogant, absolute reason is drawing to a close and that it is high time to draw conclusions from that fact.

Communism was not defeated by military force, but by life, by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of Being and man to manipulation. It was defeated by a revolt of colour, authenticity, history in all its variety, and human individuality against imprisonment within a uniform ideology.

This powerful signal, this important message to the human race, is coming at the eleventh hour.

We all know that our civilization is in danger. The population explosion and the greenhouse effect, holes in the ozone and AIDS, the threat of nuclear terrorism and the dramatically widening gap between the rich North and the poor South, the danger of famine, the depletion of the biosphere and the mineral resources of the planet, the expansion of commercial television culture and the growing threat of regional wars -- all this combined with thousands of other things represent a general threat to mankind.

The large paradox at the moment is that man -- a great collector of information -- is well aware of all this, yet is absolutely incapable of dealing with the danger. Traditional science, with its usual coolness, can describe the different ways we might destroy ourselves, but it cannot offer us truly effective and practicable instructions on how to avert them. There is too much to know; the information is muddled or poorly organized; these processes can no longer be fully grasped and understood, let alone contained or halted. Modern man, proud of having used impersonal reason to release a giant genie from its bottle, is now impersonally distressed to find he can't drive it back into the bottle again.

We cannot do it because we cannot step beyond our own shadow. We are trying to deal with what we have unleashed by employing the same means we used to unleash it in the first place. We are looking for new scientific recipes, new ideologies, new control systems, new institutions, new instruments to eliminate the dreadful consequences of our previous recipes, ideologies, control systems, institutions and instruments. We treat the fatal consequences of technology as though they were a technical defect that could be remedied by technology alone. We are looking for an objective way out of the crisis of objectivism.

Everything would seem to suggest that this is not the way to go. We cannot devise, within the traditional modern attitude to reality, a system that will eliminate all the disastrous consequences of previous systems. We cannot discover a law or theory whose technical application will eliminate all the disastrous consequences of the technical application of earlier laws and technologies.

What is needed is something different, something larger. Man's attitude to the world must be radically changed. We have to abandon the arrogant belief that the world is merely a puzzle to be solved, a machine with instructions for use waiting to be discovered, a body of information to be fed into a computer in the hope that, sooner or later, it will spit out a universal solution.

It is my profound conviction that we have to release from the sphere of private whim such forces as a natural, unique and unrepeatable experience of the world, an elementary sense of justice, the ability to see things as others do, a sense of transcendental responsibility, archetypal wisdom, good taste, courage, compassion, and faith in the importance of particular measures that do not aspire to be a universal key to salvation. Such forces must be rehabilitated. Things must once more be given a chance to present themselves as they are, to be perceived in their individuality. We must see the pluralism of the world, and not bind it by seeking common denominators or reducing everything to a single common equation. We must try harder to understand than to explain. The way forward is not in the mere construction of universal systemic solutions, to be applied to reality from the outside; it is also in seeking to get to the heart of reality through personal experience. Such an approach promotes an atmosphere of tolerant solidarity and unity in diversity based on mutual respect, genuine pluralism and parallelism. In a word, human uniqueness, human action and the human spirit must be rehabilitated.

The world, too, has something like a spirit or soul. That, however, is something more than a mere body of information that can be externally grasped and objectified and mechanically assembled. Yet this does not mean that we have no access to it. Figuratively speaking, the human spirit is made from the same material as the spirit of the world. Man is not just an observer, a spectator, an analyst or a manager of the world. Man is a part of the world and his spirit is part of the spirit of the world. We are merely a peculiar node of Being, a living atom within it, or rather a cell that, if sufficiently open to itself and its own mystery, can also experience the mystery, the will, the pain, and the hope of the world.

The world today is a world in which generality, objectivity and universality are in crisis. This world presents a great challenge to the practice of politics which, it seems to me, still has a technocratic, utilitarian approach to Being, and therefore to political power as well. Original ideas and actions, unique and therefore always risky, often lose their human ethos and therefore, de facto, their spirit after they have gone through the mill of objective analysis and prognoses. Many of the traditional mechanisms of democracy created and developed and conserved in the modern era are so linked to the cult of objectivity and statistical average that they can annul human individuality. We can see this in political language, where cliché often squeezes out a personal tone. And when a personal tone does crop up, it is usually calculated, not an outburst of personal authenticity.

* It is my impression that sooner or later politics will be faced with the task of finding a new, post-modern face. A politician must become a person again, someone who trusts not only a scientific representation and analysis of the world, but also the world itself. He must believe not only in sociological statistics, but in real people. He must trust

not only an objective interpretation of reality, but also his own soul, not only an adopted ideology, but also his own thoughts; not only the summary reports he receives each morning, but also his own feeling. Soul, individual spirituality, first-hand personal insight into things, the courage to be himself and go the way his conscience points, humility in the face of the mysterious order of Being, confidence in its natural direction and, above all, trust in his own subjectivity as his principle link with the subjectivity of the world -- these, in my view, are the qualities that politicians of the future should cultivate.

Looking at politics "from the inside", as it were, has if anything confirmed my belief that the world of today -- with the dramatic changes it is going through and in its determination not to destroy itself -- presents a great challenge to politicians.

It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways of managing society, the economy, and the world as such. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave. And who but politicians should lead the way? Their changed attitude toward the world, themselves, and their responsibility can, in turn, give rise to truly effective systemic and institutional changes.

You have certainly heard of the "butterfly effect". It is a belief that everything in the world is so mysteriously and comprehensively interconnected that a slight, seemingly insignificant wave of a butterfly's wing in a single spot on this planet can unleash a typhoon thousands of miles away.

I think we must believe in this effect in politics. We cannot assume that our microscopic, yet truly unique everyday actions are of no consequence simply because they apparently cannot resolve the immense problems of today.

This is an a priori nihilistic assertion, and it is an expression of the arrogant, modern rationality that believes it knows how the world works.

But what do we really know about it?

Can we say that a casual conversation between two bankers and the Prince of Wales over dinner tonight will not sow a seed from which a wonderful flower will one day grow for the whole world to admire?

In a world of global civilization, only those who are looking for a technical trick to save that civilization need feel despair. But those who believe, in all modesty, in the mysterious power of their own human Being, which mediates between them and the mysterious power of the world's Being, have no reason to despair at all.

Thank you for your kind attention.