



CODE '11 Budapest Conference on Democracy and Human Rights

Organized by the International Centre for Democratic Transition and the Tom Lantos Institute

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Remarks by H.E. János Martonyi

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning! I am very happy to be here – I know that's what every conference speaker says -, but in my case, it has a real meaning. I am happy to be here, because this conference is one in a series of events, which we amongst ourselves call the “Golden Week”, in order to express how important this week's events will be for us – and I hope, in a broader sense, too. This week is an expression of the Hungarian Government's efforts to adopt our foreign policy, too, to the new situation that is emerging in the beginning of the 21st century. In this, post-Westphalien world we must understand that the old methods, the old thinking and the diplomacy based on them does not satisfy the needs to successfully handle the challenges that we have to face – especially, if we want to have a foreign policy that not only reacts to the, but also proactively tries to influence them.

In the course of the new approach we have identified different layers of our policy. We are a member of the European Union, and we do everything in our might to strengthen the Union, especially by strengthening Hungary: only a strong country can be part of a strong Union. It is against this background that we further strengthen our Alliance with the United States. These two things do not contradict each other: on the contrary, these two things mutually reinforce each other. We cannot imagine one without the other. And there is another aspect of our new policy: we just concluded a most successful visit of the Prime Minister of China. This is yet another contribution to our efforts to strengthen Hungary, the EU and the Alliance.



Some might think now, it is ridiculous that a small country like Hungary, wants to “influence” events. But this is one of the new essential parts of this new situation and the new policy that small countries must, too, think and act and do whatever they can – exactly, because the challenges are so huge and so new. This week reflects this new concept. We are just finishing the six months rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union – and with all due modesty, I can tell: this has been a success. We faced a new challenge: how to conduct the Presidency under the new circumstances of the Lisbon Treaty and I believe we have proved that it is possible to “let” the Brussels institutions work – and encourage them to be more effective – and at the same time, “show the Hungarian flag”, the Hungarian ideas and promote the Hungarian initiatives. It is exactly in the areas, which were chosen by the organizers – and I want to congratulate the Tom Lantos Institute and the International Center of Democratic Transition for their excellent choice – that the Hungarian Presidency and the European institutions worked together so excellently. We managed to adopt the first ever strategy on how to approach the problems related to the largest minority in Europe, the Roma, to promote the deepening of the Eastern Partnership and respond the challenges and use the opportunities offered by the “Arab Spring”.

These problems are the ones that really haunt us these days. Of course, we speak more – and rightly so – about the financial crisis, on how to handle it and I am proud to tell that in this area the European Union has made more progress in the last six months – during the Hungarian Presidency- than during many years before. We also made a lot of progress in an area that many suggested was dead, or at least semi-dead for years: enlargement. The admission of Croatia to the European Union is of course, an event, which is important enough in itself – especially for Croatia. But it also sends a message to the other countries of the Western Balkans – but in my own view also countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – that enlargement, the “open door policy” is not a mere slogan, but reality: those who perform well – for their own sake – receive the “reward – the European Union IS ready and able to absorb new members.

The subjects to be discussed at this conference, seemingly, differ: what is in common between Roma issues and the problems of our neighborhood? In deed, these are different problems. However, finding the appropriate approach and solutions to them is crucial for us. The Roma population is part of our nation. My Government is strongly committed to ensure everybody’s human rights and freedoms regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, etc. The Roma issue is, however, even more complicated than that: should this

problem be handled as a pure human right problem, we would definitely fail in our efforts. The first thing to do is to be courageous enough to discuss the problem. Discuss it with the Roma, but also within the non-Roma society. The earlier administrations did not dare – for political correctness reasons – to openly talk about this problem. Now we do. We do and will discuss all the problems and work out the solutions together. We have also recognized that this problem – as so many others – cannot be dealt with on a national basis only. It does not relieve national Governments – us – of the basic responsibility, but it also requires an international, EU-wide strategy. That’s why the Hungarian Presidency set the elaboration and the adoption of the EU-wide Roma strategy as one of our priorities during our Presidency. And we kept our promise. In spite of the new, dangerous challenges posed by the financial crisis, we insisted that the Roma Strategy be adopted during our Presidency –not because we wanted to earn special recognition, but because we remained convinced that this issue is urgent and important and any delay would only complicate the solution – which will be a long and difficult process.

The adoption for the EU Roma Strategy is, however, only the first – important and indispensable – step. To be followed by national strategies and – most importantly – by action at all levels. I hope and expect that the discussion on this conference will give us further input and impetus and I can tell you, my Government expects it and looks forward to using it in our further work.

The neighborhood policy of the European Union needs no argumentation to show, how important it is. And now it became even more important with the events in the Middle East. The Eastern Partnership was another priority of the Hungarian presidency. Life is, however, always more complicated than strategies. We were very happy to witness that the Middle East is “catching up” with Central Europe. We very happily look forward to seeing those changes lead to genuine democracies in the Arab world – something many people thought impossible or at least very remote just one year ago. Now, life has tied these two regions together: we are firmly convinced that it is our moral obligation, our interest and desire to offer our support to our Arab friends. We do not have much money, but we do have something, nobody else can offer: experience in transition, how to do it and how not to do it, how to solve basic problems and what mistakes should be avoided. It is not surprising, but still a very good feeling to learnt that our Arab friends do know it – better than many others. I was very glad to experience this during my visits to Egypt and Tunisia and was even more happy to be able to promise that our help will come. And we started to deliver already – not least with



the help of the ICDT, which proves to be our flagship in this endeavor – as this conference witnesses it so brilliantly.

I hope very much that the discussion during this conference will help us in this, too. We need to know what is needed for the success in these countries, from Moldova to Tunisia and from Egypt to Ukraine. We will continue to promote the European integration of those countries of the Eastern Partnership, who show their readiness and ability to become a partner that is ready to be integrated. And we will, too, offer and lend our support for the closest possible partnership with the countries, which so strongly prove now that the values of democracy and human rights are universal.

Dear Colleagues,

This conference is the first International Conference on Democracy and Human Rights, to be followed by a conference every year. We are convinced that the idea of discussing the most relevant issues related to these topics is not only appropriate but most needed and the Hungarian Government is committed to continue this effort. Please, use this opportunity, too, to tell us what you think we could do more and differently. Tell us, how we can be more helpful. Tell us, how we can contribute to your success because your success is our success as well. We do not think that we know everything better than you do. On the contrary: we firmly believe that you are the ones, who know best what is needed for your successful democratic transition. Please, consider us as the best friends and best allies in this endeavor. My Government is firmly committed to be exactly that.