



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 Prof. Dr. István Gyarmati

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I think it is very unpopular to be the first speaker because probably the best part and definitely the most pleasant part of such conferences is the part before and after the speeches, but you have to bear with us for only a few speeches, and I promise you they will be interesting and not too long.

I want to welcome everybody: ministers, excellencies, and friends, and share with you what is the context of this conference, because we have hundreds of conferences every year throughout the world. This one is a special one. Of course it is special because it is in Budapest and we organized it, but it is also a special one because you are witnessing the birth of something new, we hope, which is a new series of conferences we would like to host in Hungary from now on. That is why it is called the First Conference on Democracy and Human Rights, and of course sometimes the first is not followed by a second: George Hapsburg is amongst us and he can testify to the fact that there was a Franz Joseph the first but there was never a second, but I think this conference will not be the first and only. We think that the biggest challenge in today's world is the spread, or the not spread, of democracy. We live in a time when we see that democracy does not belong to the white men only. We see some incredible things happening that nobody would have thought would happen, which we call the Arab Spring. But we remember, especially Hungarians and especially my age, that 25 years ago we thought that it would be equally impossible to change the regime in the Communist countries and to get rid of the Soviet Union. I think the word 'never' is out of use in this context forever, if there is anything forever. So we thought that this is the good time to launch a series of conferences on human rights and democracy. And you will probably ask, why do we make a differentiate the two? It is not to suggest that there can be democracy without human rights. I think the full implementation of human rights is



a part of democracy that is indispensable, without which there is no democracy. But we wanted to emphasize this by putting it into the title because there are some who try to suggest that there can be democracy without human rights, that there can be some special kinds of democracy, like sovereign democracy, which do not include human rights, and we want to send a message, that in our opinion, there is no way that democracy can be established and implemented by the people without the full implementation of human rights. Everything is about human rights, the ultimate goal is human rights. The second thing we want to emphasize with this conference is that democracy is not only for governments. I would say, if I may Mr. Minister, that it is in the first instance not about governments. Governments are there to ensure something that belongs to the people by their birth, human rights and democracy. It is about the people, it is about civil society, in cooperation with governments. And this is also a new concept that the civil society works with governments because we share a goal, building democracy in our countries. It is our special privilege that we can launch this series of conferences basically at the same time when we launch a new initiative of the Hungarian government and the Hungarian people, and especially by the family of somebody who was probably one of, if not the most prominent fighter for human rights, Tom Lantos, and I am extremely happy to welcome his wife and his family here in this audience. We will have the chance to launch the Tom Lantos Institute in Budapest in two days in the presence of you and also some very important and outstanding personalities who not only carry their authority by the office they hold today or they held a few years ago, but by their personality and by their contribution to democracy in their own country of course but also throughout the world. They happen to be two ladies, actually, which makes it even more interesting I think for us, because we think that minorities and gender issues are at the center of our activities and our interests. This conference will open a series of conferences on democracy and human rights in Hungary, which we will hold every year, and I would like to thank everybody who came and who supported this conference, especially the Government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I conclude my introduction by introducing Minister Martonyi, who needs no introduction of course as a person, but I don't like to praise ministers frankly and very few of them get this, but I think Minister Martonyi's presence here and the fact that he accepted after a tiring trip to Brussels yesterday and many other trips coming up in the next days to be here with us, I think this is the best contribution of the Foreign Ministry. Not to underestimate the financial contribution, but I think that substance is always more important than money, and I'm sure that we will hear substance from Minister Martonyi, which is also not true for every minister, those present exempted of



course. But I think it is a special opportunity that this conference is opened by H.E. Minister Janos Martonyi. Janos, please.