

Ensuring European societal resilience to future challenges

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Dear colleagues,

It is always a pleasure to participate at the conferences organized by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. This time, in particular, due to the fact that the main topic of today's conference, the defense of democracy, is at the very core of the foundation's activities. Moreover, democracy is the cornerstone of the European integration project and the European international order, currently challenged by the Russian aggression to Ukraine.

Unfortunately, after February 24, 2022, it has become clear that Putin's Russia cannot be treated as a partner, not even as a competitor, but only as a geopolitical and ideological rival, a threat to our security, freedom and democracy. Moscow's decision to launch a full-fledged attack on Ukraine, from Russia and Belorussia, was a shocking awakening for Europe, as the High Representative Josep Borrell wrote in his foreword to the EU's Strategic Compass document.

A shock, at least, to those who still wanted to harbor illusions of a peaceful, post-modern world, driven mainly by trade interests and free of conventional wars in Europe. A shock to those who bet on Europe's development, and even on the regional and global advancement of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, through a paradigm of energy integration with Russia and a trade integration with China.

Such an illusion was destroyed on February 24, 2022. And a more clear vision of the real world re-emerged in Europe, taking into account more seriously geopolitical risks, security threats, as well as the resilience of our societies to cope with a brave new world.

Having these recent developments in mind, we can now reflect on how to ensure European societal resilience to current and future challenges. I am sure that our panelists will later on elaborate on the multiple challenges presented in front of us, from security threats, financial and economic crisis, possible new pandemics, to energy transition and the growing challenge of mitigating the effects of climate change. I am confident that they will assess the relevant strategies and policies the European Union is, or should be, developing as an answer to these questions.

While all these topics are very important, I believe that, in order to ensure societal resilience, we need to address first the issue of social integration and cohesion as an enabler of resilience.

The process of integration in a national community or at the European level, starts with a commonality of purpose based on shared values and interests. On the contrary, a process of fragmentation begins with the lack or erosion of common values. We can deepen EU's defense cooperation and develop new capabilities through PESCO, allocate more than 700 billion euros in the Resilience and Reconstruction Facility, invest in our energy transition and independence through RE-POWER EU, empower the European Commission to negotiate the best possible terms with the pharmaceutical industry in times of pandemics, but without common values, and consequently a commonality of purpose, our policies will not be sustainable and our societies will not be able to endure the hurdles of certain necessary measures throughout an extended period of time.

Furthermore, in a world of renewed geopolitical competition and confrontation, we cannot only assess our resilience without reflecting on the resilience of our rivals and their ability to pose a long-term threat to our security.

In this sense, in this international context of increased security and ideological competition, and even confrontation, we should not underestimate the resilience of Europe's geopolitical rivals; the readiness of their societies to endure protracted wars, decreasing living standards, Western sanctions and, basically, their readiness to sacrifice the well-being of the individual citizens in the altar of the proclaimed greatness and glory of the Nation, the Homeland, the "Empire".

Now, in my view, it would be unrealistic and wrong for Europe to embark upon a geopolitical competition requesting our societies to do the same. As a Christian Democrat, I cannot advocate societal resilience based on a nationalistic discourse, although I am fully aware of the mobilizing and homogenizing power of such narrative. Pursuing a nationalistic path will amount to the ideological defeat of Europe, a return to great-power competition within the old continent, and consequently its fragmentation and the victory of the geopolitical rivals of the European Union.

Having said that, again as a Christian Democrat, I also know that we will not be able to develop resilient societies in Europe if we do nothing, keep the status quo and continue to base our efforts on the currently prevailing individualistic paradigm. It seems that today only Pope Francis speaks loudly and clearly about this risk, reminding us of the Social Doctrine. from Leo XIII. to our days, which has consistently denounced the structural shortcomings and dangers of individualism.

Few days ago, the new Archbishop of Zagreb, mons. Dražen Kutleša, invited us to reflect on effects of individualism. I believe that such a

reflection is needed also for the consideration of societal resilience in Europe.

In this sense, let me note that individualism, which dominated the ideological discourse in the 19th century, was thought to be overcome by social policies applied after WWII, mainly by the Christian Democratic leaders that rebuilt Europe and launched its integration process. On the ashes of a continent destroyed by national-socialism and facing the threat of the Soviet internationalist socialism, they understood that Europe cannot be rebuilt and made more resilient by going back to the weak basis of individualistic ideologies (which proved to be unable to stop the advance of autocratic and totalitarian forces), but only by going forward with the practical implementation of the Christian Social Doctrine.

This approach was successful in confronting the challenges of the Cold War, but, after its end, it was gradually marginalized. Today, individualism is again at the center of the political discourse, both on the left and the right.

Anthropological individualism is at the base of the policies advocated today by the European progressives and leftists in their pursue to constantly redefine human rights and social institutions, distancing them from Maritain's Integral Humanism and getting closer to Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony.

Individualism is also at the base of today's conservatives, also known as neoconservatives, since they would like to "conserve", or rather restore, the classical individualistic model of laissez-faire to the detriment of Europe's social state and social market economy.

Regardless of their electoral competition, left and right forces in today's Europe seem to be united in their acceptance of the individualistic paradigm as an ordering concept on social and economic issues. In such social order, the concepts of community and common good are weakened, or sidelined, and societies become more fragmented and less able to develop its resilience to threats and challenges.

As a logical consequence of the transposition of the individualistic approach from the domestic to the international arena, governments increasingly pursue an egoistic and nationalistic policy disregarding the common good of the EU or even denying the existence of such a European community as a whole, replicating Thatcher's notorious remark that "there is no such a thing as society". According to this view, society is nothing but the sum of individuals, and consequently Europe is nothing but the sum of national states. There is no common good, but only the pursuit of individual rights and interests. There is no European commonality of purpose, but only the pursuit of national interests.

I believe that the Russian aggression should be for us a wake-up call also for us - politicians, academics, foundations of Christian Democratic orientation. We have let individualistic ideologies, left and right, to dominate the public debate, the narrative, eroding the sense of

community (beginning with family as the basic and more resilient community), forgetting about the pursuit of the common good. As a consequence, we got a process of fragmentation, in our national societies and at the European level.

That is not an optimal situation, especially in the current geopolitical circumstances. Niall Fergusson has already baptized the time after February 24th, 2022 as Cold War II. Without going now into that debate, let me just say that it is quite possible that we will have to face a protracted geopolitical and ideological confrontation with global and regional autocracies.

We have the material resources to face these challenges, but do our societies have the moral and readiness to endure the sacrifices needed to defend our values?

We can proudly say that Europe stands for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. However, the dominant individualistic ideologies have emptied these concepts of their social value. They have reduced them to instruments for the advancement of individual and particular interests. Therefore, at the very moment when these interests are not served (at times of economic crisis for example) confidence in the democratic institutions erodes. Our geopolitical and ideological rivals exploit this weakness.

Therefore, in addition to all the financial and policy instruments, from RRF to the regular MFF, Europe needs a new political and social concept able to mobilize popular support and legitimacy for a longer period of confrontation with its geopolitical and ideological rivals.

I believe that Christian Democrats should make a new effort to develop an updated political and social concept for Europe, encompassing some positive elements and contributions of liberalism to democracy and human rights, but renouncing to a purely individualistic view and reinstalling the value of communities, the importance of the intermediate bodies in society, not expecting everything from the State or leaving everything to the market.

Family, faith-based organizations, professional associations should be reinforced and allowed to play a more pivotal role as enablers of social cohesion and, consequently, societal resilience. Christian Democrats have a crucial task to bring these issues to the center of the political narrative in Europe with the clear aim to replace the current process of social and political fragmentation with a process of inclusion, integration and solidarity, thus making Europe more resilient to face current and future challenges.

Thank you.