Keynote: Innovation in Politics

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Dear Award-Winners and Participants of the Innovation in Politics-Award,

Dear honourable Guests,

Dear Madams and Sirs,

It is my pleasure to being given the key note for this fantastic gala event, honouring engagement and innovation in politics for a better democracy and a better Europe! Thank you all for this opportunity. My compliments and congratulations go to all the smart award-winners that this gala will present to you!

Yet, it is not my role to go deeper into the Innovations Awards. My role is to deliver a speech. And this is a quite complicate thing. I stand between you and the buffet and I have only 15 minutes time. More importantly, I am told to deliver a *serious* keynote with *intellectual* content, where you are expecting to *celebrate* your awards – and that is a *contradictio in adjecto*. How to capture your attention in this environment of joy and glamour? I can only lose in this game, but having said this: let's start!

To kick you off, let me give you an impression that I had this summer: I was visiting, in Hamburg, the exposition about the 1918-revolution and in that exhibition, there was a small video showing how the Hamburg Opera – displaying "*Schwanensee*" from Tchaikovsky – was emptied by some of the "*Soldatenräte*" ("Council of self-elected Soldiers") that just had been created in the hours of the revolutionary happenings. Soldiers were marching through Hamburg, in the aim to conquer the townhouse – a house like the Vienna *Rathaus* we are in today – and they wanted to disrupt the opera and send the visitors home. This aim was driven, in a way, by the kindness of the soldiers who wanted to sort of secure the Bourgeoisie and to avoid that people get into the street fire. The little movie basically shows how one of the soldiers, an officer, tries to negotiate with the opera director, how and when – after which curtain – he could go on stage and declare that the opera is disrupted because of a revolution.

The scenery has a lot of *slapstick components*: the opera director doesn't understand, in the first place, that there is now a revolution. He does not want his play being interrupted and asks, whether the revolution can wait until the opera is finished. The soldier, on the other hand, knowing that the troupes are approaching, is in a hurry to empty the opera house. And both share the concern *how* to inform the audience about the revolution and what to do, if some of the ladies would start screaming, when a soldier entered on stage.

I thought that little history is a nice and funny story to project ourselves into today's Europe. Just wondering, what would happen, here and now, if a soldier came to stage and tell us about a revolution? Would we be concerned? Would we empty the room quickly and silently? Or would we not believe it and insists on the gala going on, as the Bourgeoisie 100 years ago in Hamburg did?

That story leads me straight into my topic for today:

The State of Europe and how to move & shake the EU towards becoming a real democracy?

I know that all the participants of "*Innovation in Politics*" work hard to make democracy in Europe a better place. I scrolled through your projects and most are about citizen's participation, digital improvements, ecological innovations, better treatment of minorities and all of this is obviously very important. The EU system of today as much as many of its member state have deep lacunas in recognizing the citizens will, or, to say it differently, in the organisation of the *volonté general*, as Rousseau told us. Many of us have the feeling, that politics these days tends to be biased, tilting to put efficiency and economic criteria above social needs and citizens interest. That is where you all seem to chime with your projects and initiatives in in order to sweep behind the many flaws of the system. And obviously, all of that is good. But let's not forget: participation alone cannot solve a deep social crisis, all European member states are in, with income discrepancies steadily growing.

Yet, as Theodor Adorno, the most influential thinker of critical theory once said: "There is no good life in wrong environment" ("*Es gibt kein gutes Leben im Falschen*", as the quote runs in German). If a system is structurally flawed or even wrong, there is no way to sort of sweep away its negative consequences durably, and the best efforts won't help. Efforts help to go into denial for a certain while, to attenuate the negative effects or to diminish the harm. But

they don't go against the slow perishing of a system, which ultimately will start to sink and even to stink. And the question is whether this is the state of today's EU's?

In his essay *After Europe,* the political intellectual from Bulgaria, Ivan Krastev, raises the question of whether we are experiencing a comparable "disintegration moment", as was once the case with the multi-ethnic Habsburg empire or the Soviet Union. He aptly formulates: "The end … is both inevitable and inadvertent." Referring to Josef Roth's novel *Radetzky March,* he notes that when political and cultural artefacts disappear, they will do so abruptly. The end is the natural outcome of structural deficiencies and an unintended consequence of a sleepwalking process, a special moment with its own dynamic. It is legitimate to ask whether we are not moving towards such an epoch of changing Europe. As Stefan Zweig once wrote: we as contemporaries are not able to recognise the historical moment that we are in. And this moment is the potential collapse of the European integration project. *Yeah, I know, this is hard stuff for a gala evening, but I want to capture your attention…*

With Brexit looming at the horizon in March 2019 - I guess everybody listened to the messy news in the past days -; with Poland and Hungary already having sneaked out of European "Rule-of-Law" standards; with Austria, the country, we are in today, struggling with media concentration or intrusion of its Intelligence Agency; with the Italian budget crisis and with European elections in May 2019, displaying the so-called populist parties at rank second of the seat distribution, the EU may be not only in a deep, multiple crisis; it might be beyond "peak" so to say: incapable to reform itself and structurally doomed to hostile take-over by identitarian, populist and nationalist forces.

The EU has, in fact, fallen to a deep low. Last year it enjoyed the confidence of only around 47 per cent of all Europeans. The great erosion of the European idea has left deep marks on the continent. The party systems in most EU member states have collapsed along the dividing line of the positioning towards the EU, not least in the wake of the euro crisis, with parties in Southern countries turning "populist" for the sake of austerity and parties in Northern Europe turning "populist" for the sake of "*no-transfer-union*". The European social democrats have mostly disappeared, the European left is deeply divided in all EU member states and the political vacuum is filled by nationalist parties that have come together in a kind of "identitarian international" from Geert Wilders to Marine Le Pen, the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party to the

Hungarian Fidesz party, the True Finns, the Austrian FPÖ or the German AfD. These parties are all well organised, they have large electorates behind them and clearly get enough financial sponsoring – as the recent party funding *causa* of Alice Weidel in Germany shows. Capitalism has shown in the 20s of last century that it is compatible with fascism. Capitalism demonstrates these days that it is equally compatible with populism: stock markets went through the roof, when Trump or Bolsonaro in Brazil were elected, meaning: markets do *welcome* and not *punish* populism!

This raises the question of what we are doing in this nearly "Hegelian" moment, in which a system is politically exhausted, but at the same time has no power to reform itself, because it is in a populist state of shock and afraid to move?
Populism could only be on the rise, because the citizens were the forgotten entity in the whole EU's institutional set-up, which displays a parliament nearly without legislative power, no accountability and without control of the budget or the executive power of the EU. The so-called "democratic deficit" of the EU became unbearable in recent crisis years and legitimized critic was left to the populists, as the EU system showed increasing inertia to change. The sovereignty question – who decides in the EU? – became wide open and until it is clearly answered the EU will probably not have enough political cloud to do anything.

We definitely need to discover the European citizen as sovereign of the European political system, if we want to conquer the hearts and minds of people for Europe again, but a different kind of Europe: not a technocratic EU, but a democratic, transparent, accountable and social Europe!

Therefore, I would like to offer you today to think Europe differently, meaning a paradigm shift from "*The United States of Europe*" to a "*European Republic*": not the *states* would *do* Europe, but the *citizens* would *do* it, in a fully parliamentarized European system, without being governed by an opaque European Council! This corresponds, by the way, exactly to what founding father Jean Monnet always said: "*Europe is not about integration states, but about uniting people*". Europe as a Republic – that is *my* idea for political innovation today – is build around one single idea: the principle of political equality for all European citizens! Any democracy has as essential, though not sufficient condition that all it's citizens are equal in front of the law. Classically, "one

person, one vote" is the key requirement for a democracy and the composition of a single electoral body. Legal equality is, in the words of famous French sociologist Pierre Rosanvallon, "*Le Sace du Citoyen*" – the "sacred" of the citizens.

In current European discussions it is often neglected that the notion of "*citoyen*" ("citizen") means actually more than just sharing values or "*feeling*" somehow European. The notion of *citoyenneté* always has a *legal* underpinning: it basically means same *rights*! And precisely this is the problem of today's EU, as the notion of a "European citizenship", though granted in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, has remained normatively "empty" and does not grant all European citizens with equal rights. The Maastricht Treaty promised a "*Union of States*" and "*Union of Citizens*". Yet, only the former materialized, not the latter. To make this concrete: Had we achieved a "*Union of Citizens*", British citizens, now affected by Brexit, would – in theory – stay European citizens, despite the fact of the United Kingdom as a *state* leaving the EU. Brexit demonstrates more crudely that anything that "European citizenship" is only an empty shell and nearly meaningless!

One of the recurrent sentences in EU discussions is that the EU offers "Four Freedoms" for "*People, Goods, Capital and Services.*" Hence, until now, same European rights and regulations within the EU's legal framework are only applying to goods (in the single market), to capital (in the currency union) and to services (the factor of work across the EU). All these three – goods, capital and services – benefit from legal equality throughout Europe. The only ones who are still fragmented into national "law container" are the European citizens themselves. But the European citizens are the sovereign of the political system. In other words: oil cans or light bulbs are "equal" in European legislation across the EU, European citizens are not. Especially not regarding those things, which are dear to them with respect to the very character of a citizenship: voting, taxation and access to social rights. It is the European citizens, who don't enjoy legal equality. If the aim of Europe is still to become a full fletched democracy – one market, one currency, one democracy – this must change! Applying the principal of general political equality for all Europeans citizens would precisely be the quantum leap for the EU from a purely internal market and currency project towards a *political* unity in Europe, which was the intention of the founding fathers.

Citizens, who do embark in a political body based on equal rights ("*ius aequum*", as Cicero said) establish a republic. If European citizens were to agree on the principle of political equality, they would thus found a European Republic. That would be a paramount paradigm shift from "*United*

States of Europe", based on *integration* of nation states, towards a European Republic, with sovereignty being in the hands of European citizens and a truly representative democracy in Europe.

For many, this does not sound possible today for Europe. But this gala is about innovation in politics! Let's remember for a second that today's nation states – such as today's Germany or today's Italy – are the result of unitarian movements of the 19th century. Garibaldi once said: "*Now, that I have created the Italian Republic, I need to create the Italian citizens.*" The unification of the German territories into a German Confederation around 1870 was quite similar. A unified German social insurance system was by then as much unimaginable as is today a common European unemployment scheme. So no one can say what is conceivable on the European level in the long run. Let's not forget that most people didn't believe in the Euro, until it was in their pocket. Many things seem unbelievable in the beginning. But then they happen.

Europe as a republic could combine two trends we see in current EU discussions: the people, who want control over the political system and more participation in Europe. And, secondly, the regions, who want more power in the European system: Savoy, Bohemia, Alsace, Basque Country, Scotland, Tyrol or Bavaria, etc.: the regions could become, on an equal footing, the constitutional carriers of tomorrow's Europe, which would be closer to the citizens. Europe would finally become what it always wanted to be: "*unity in diversity*". The unity would be the normative, the legal unity for all European citizens. The diversity would stem from the regional cultural identity.

In this context, it should be noted that the European federalists of the first hour – those who wrote the Manifesto of Ventotene in 1944 and who, in the midst of fascism in the 1920s & 1930s conceptually anticipated a united Europe – had in mind the idea of Europe as a federation of roughly equal, regional units, in which the big nation states do not dominate the smaller ones. They were convinced that post-war Europe must be a federation of small entities and that obviously all citizens must share same rights and obligations beyond their ethnic origin. It is time, *Dear Madams and Sirs*, to look back to these European plans of the past in order to generate bold ideas for Europe's future – if we do not want to lose what we have on the European

continent today: freedom, peace, democracy, liberty & prosperity! These things of real value tend to disappear over night, as some start to realize….

Let me finish: today's European Union is not stable. Without a decisive step forward, the EU is not sustainable and system collapse is on the door step. The *one* European market and the *one* European currency must be embedded in a European democracy, because a currency is already a social contract! Europe in the 21st century can only function, if the European citizens are the sovereigns of the political system, if they are all equal before the law, if the European parliament decides and if there is separation of powers. The principle of general political equality is the basis of each and every democracy. If the EU were to implement it, this would be the "Great Reformation" of Europe! And it is time to do so, before the revolutionary hordes are storming through the streets, perhaps eventually closing galas like this one...

Thank you very much for your attention!