

In Defense of a Democratic Global Governance

Central European University
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My first words are of gratitude.

I would like to thank the Central European University for the kind invitation to deliver this year's Commencement Address. It is my honor to be in such a praiseworthy institution. The CEU has thriven on academic excellence and cultural diversity.

It is only fair it is hosted by a country as plural and hospitable as Hungary. But what pleases me most is the opportunity to bear witness to a unique occasion in the trajectory of you all, my dear students.

Allow me to say that you are not simply commencing upon a new stage in life. You are experiencing this rite of passage at a crucial juncture in world history. The international environment you will act upon is undergoing changes of far-reaching consequences.

What are these changes? What is actually at stake in international affairs? What trends are to be sustained and encouraged for the benefit of freedom and human development? To better address these questions, let us report back to the late eighties and recall why the 1989 revolutions meant a watershed in contemporary history. Some incurred in the fallacy of celebrating the fall of the Berlin Wall as the end of history.

You know better than I do that what the popular uprising throughout Central Europe stood for was exactly the opposite. History was revalidated as an open-ended process. Teleological conceptions of human experience fell into disrepute.

History was recognized as flowing at the discretion of popular will, evolving as the majority so wishes. Hence the renewed prestige of democracy in the aftermath of the Cold War. The example you set reverberated all over the world. In Latin America , for example, political debate underwent a sharp change. Right and Left closed ranks behind the view of democracy as a universal value.

Misconceptions about the importance of liberal tenets and representative institutions were cast aside. I am not saying that all our political vices melted into the air overnight. Suffice it to bear in mind that in the early nineties Brazil suffered the experience of an impeachment against the ruling President , who happened to be our first elected Head of Government after the military regime.

The country's political system still lacks some adjustments to improve its accountability. But, all in all, it is beyond dispute that democracy nowadays stands second to none as a standard for legitimate political authority. This applies not only to Brazil, but to South America as a whole.

Constitutional ruling was set as a condition for participation in the regional integration process. We could speak of a democratic synergy in the region, which dissuades potential plotters from conspiring against elected Governments. Most importantly, the exercise of public liberties has encouraged our peoples to call for a more balanced and democratic world order.

It is not simply a matter of consistency, of professing in external policies the same principles we abide by in domestic affairs. It is also a question of safeguarding national interests. Our social and economic prospects are all but enhanced by the existing deficit in global governance. The fact that economy is globalized but politics is not has inflicted losses all over the world, particularly in developing countries.

It is high time political mechanisms are put in force to address problems like the recurrent instability in financial markets. From Asia to Latin American, national currencies have now and then been under speculative assaults, depriving our budgets of resources deemed essential for the implementation of social programs.

I am pleased to acknowledge the contribution given by Dr. George Soros to raise global awareness about the importance of a more stable financial environment. Let us hope conditions are finally set for the updating of the international financial architecture.

No less pressing is the challenge to enable the international community to tackle new threats to world peace and security. This requires more rather than less multilateralism. I am convinced that the world is much safer with than without the United Nations. It was this assumption that inspired the drafters of the San Francisco Charter to establish in its Chapter VII mechanisms of collective security.

As you all know, the Cold War kept those mechanisms frozen. Only in the nineties could the UN collective mechanisms be brought into action to tackle challenges such as resurgence of nationalism and regional conflicts. I recall with satisfaction Brazil's participation in the United Nations missions in Angola and East Timor.

As the international community was taking stock of the UN peace enforcement efforts, it was faced with the dramatic episode of September 11th. Terrorism has ever since stood as a Damocles sword over us all. The nature of this threat is entirely different from that of any menace the world had to deal with in the past.

Terror is faceless, diffuse and operates through networks. How should the community of nations better respond to such a volatile menace? Are unilateral measures or selective alliances the most effective way to proceed? Or should we rather help the United Nations live up to its role of guardian of international peace and security?

If the goal is to achieve durable solutions, the UN should not be off staged. A threat as omnipresent as terrorism can only be confronted by a worldwide strategy. And no such strategy works without the consent of the majority of nations. Hence the imperative of bringing the only existing universal forum back to the forefront. It goes without saying that no effort should be spared to render the UN more effective. But, again, this implies more rather than less participation.

The more representative the permanent core of the Security Council is, the better the chances that its directives will be accepted by all. The claim for a closer dialogue between the United Nations and civil society is also relevant. Perhaps not with regard to specific security concerns, but in what respects the building and spreading of a new ethics in international affairs.

The prevailing logic of power and supremacy is to be tempered by an ethics of solidarity. Non-state actors are well positioned to build bridges among nations and cultures. Civil society can certainly help couch a future order on cosmopolitan principles such as human rights and protection of the environment. I am perfectly aware that these ideas might sound like sailing against the wind. But I am convinced they point to a safer and more decent world.

And public life is constantly teaching us that politics is not the art of the possible, but the art of making the necessary possible. At the end of the day, our future lies in our hands. May I wish you all the best in these uncertain, but challenging times.

Thank you very much.