

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves on a conference "Democracy and Security: Core Values and Sound Policies", Prague, 4 June 2007

I am humbled here today to speak at a conference on democracy, where the participants include Václav Havel, Natan Sharansky, Garry Kasparov and Alexander Milinkevich, people who have stood and in some cases still stand on the frontlines in the struggle against authoritarianism and despotism.

At the end of the Cold War, and certainly in the spirit of those heady times, Francis Fukuyama in a well-known essay, posited that liberal democracy would ultimately triumph against authoritarianism. While I share his optimism, few understood then that the discrediting of an unviable ideology would not necessarily lead to liberal democracy. Authoritarians learn too. What we see in the world today is how well they have learned.

I

Since the liberation of Eastern Europe from undemocratic communist rule we have come to accept as a truism that Democracies do not go to war with each other. Before I look more carefully at what this idea entails, allow me to begin rather bluntly by asking a question I couldn't even imagine asking when I wrote my talk: if it is true that Democracies do not go to war with each other, then what is a country that threatens to target its nuclear missiles at Europe doing in the G-8, the club of large industrial *Democracies*? Either the proposition is wrong or the G-8 is based on something else than a common commitment to democratic rule.

Leaving that aside, however, empirically it appears to be true, that democracies do not go to war with each other. They don't even threaten each other. At the very least and for the purposes of this conference, the contra positive is absolutely true: Lack of democracy is a pre-condition for aggressive international behaviour – would North Korea, Iran, Saddam's Iraq, Sudan or a host of other despotically ruled countries engage in or threaten war if they were democratic? – it's unlikely. Our question at this conference is what do we, the community of democratic countries do about this?

The idea that democracies do not go to war with each other is true also as long as we are clear to define what a democracy is and what is not democracy. First, I would rule out all kinds of modifiers. As the survivors of communist rule know, "Peoples' Democracies" are not Democracies. A "managed" Democracy is already a priori a contradiction in terms, which probably is why it has been replaced by the spin-masters of Russian discourse in the past year or so with the term "Sovereign democracy", as if Democracy without that modifier is somehow subject to foreign influence. This is a notion I shall return to later.

In general, we can say that as soon as you need to put an adjectival

modifier in front of the word "Democracy" in a description of a country's mode of government, we are looking at something that is not a democracy. Yes, political parties – Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, Liberal Democrats – use modifiers to denote their positions on issues such as government spending, social welfare, etc., but this all assumes a functioning democracy. These labels describe where parties reside in the political spectrum that already presupposes the existence of a spectrum. (Of course we know these labels can be misleading. Russia has Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party, though perhaps I am a bit harsh here, since in recent times Zhirinovsky has in the context of Russian politics been rather reasonable. Take that perhaps as a sign of how much things in Russia have changed).

It is clear that for a Democracy to go to war, it has to have a very good reason to do so. This comes perforce from what a democracy is. It's not only free and fair elections, but a press and electronic free to report on the government's actions and criticize them if warranted, freedom of association, the freedom to engage in peaceful protest, and perhaps most importantly, the sine qua non for any democracy, the rule of law, where the laws apply equally to all. All of these together give democracies something undemocratic regimes lack: legitimacy. If these conditions are not met, then war and aggression are far less risky politically. Since wars mean suffering and hardship, democratic governments do not undertake war lightly. Because wars are rarely popular when you have a free media, going to war is a political risk for the government. The media and free and fair elections are a very strong check on a government and so unless your country's security is threatened, be it by foreign power or more recently by terrorists, democratic governments try to find other solutions.

But in international behaviour short of war, what is the connection between democracy and security? From the end of the Cold War to a few years back, I thought this an interesting theoretical issue, for Europe at least, something I in fact wrote an essay on several years ago. Today, it is no longer a theoretical issue, certainly not for Europe.

For unfortunately, democracy itself has come to be seen in some quarters as a threat, and when small democratic countries are perceived by a powerful undemocratic country as a threat or as enemies by virtue of their democracy, all of Europe's security is at risk.

II

It was a year ago at a security conference in Tbilisi that I suddenly was struck by the realization that Russia has bad relations with all countries on its borders that were once part of the USSR and that today meet the standards of democracy I listed above. Moreover, Russia has good relations only with those countries on its borders that are *undemocratic*: Belarus, Central Asian despotisms, warlordishly ruled territories of dubious legality such as Transnistria, Abhasia and South Ossetia. Indeed, the proof of this bizarre state of affairs is that should an undemocratic country become democratic, as Georgia did in its Rose Revolution, as Ukraine did two and a half years ago, that is when relations with Russia rapidly

deteriorate. I used to think that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were disliked because of something we did wrong. I realize now that it is because we did something right. At the same time, all of these small or smaller countries – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Georgia, have problems with only one country, Russia. Russia on the other hand seems to have problems with lots of countries. Perhaps it is time to wonder why, and why they all happen to be countries that have chosen democracy.

Indeed I find myself thinking more and more about Winston Smith, the protagonist of George Orwell's 1984, a book I thought had lost its relevance. One day Smith, ranting at the daily "Hate hour" at East Asia – or was it Oceania – suddenly begins to wonder whether the Great Enemy was not another country the week before. So too with democracies. The flavour of the month is Estonia. Last fall the great enemy of Russia was another large power, Georgia. Then, lists were compiled at government orders of children with Georgian names enrolled in Moscow schools, large numbers of Georgians were shoved into cargo transports and summarily deposited in Tbilisi. Now all that is forgotten. Before that, Latvia, another large and threatening democracy, was the enemy.

I wondered about this paradox, that democracy on Russia's borders is perceived as a threat while lack of democracy means stability. Why on earth would a country think or behave this way in the 21st century?

I believe I found part of the answer in book I would highly recommend, *Dangerous Nation*, by Robert Kagan, who several years ago wrote another insightful little book *Power and Paradise*, and is best known for saying that Europeans are from Venus and Americans from Mars. *Dangerous Nation* is a history of U.S. foreign policy up to the end of the 19th Century, an arcane topic for 2007 perhaps, but he analyses *inter alia* the refusal of the American slave-holding states to allow the country to take in new states from the American West. They were opposed because new, non-slave-holding states joining the U.S. would have to enter as free states, i.e. slavery would be forbidden.

Why did the southern states fear new, free-states? Because they were afraid that they would be a bad example in treating blacks as equals, that more free states would de-stabilize their own undemocratic, slave-holding societies. Old free states could remain free but no new free states were to be permitted. The Southern states instead pushed for the U.S. to take in slave-holding countries from the former Spanish empire – recall that only non-slave-holding territories had to become U.S. states as free states – thereby continuing the legitimization of lack of democracy.

Sounds familiar? It should. Why is it that our neighbor respects "old democracies" – France, Germany or Finland – for example, but not "new ones", Poland, for example, or especially those like Estonia, Ukraine or Georgia? Why does Russia support dictatorial Belarus? Undemocratic regimes in Central Asia? Why does Russia try to emasculate the OSCE's election monitoring system, the ODHIR, which consistently has found serious lapses in countries of the Former Soviet Union Russia views as

allies?

It should be clear: our existence, our success gives the lie to the idea that democracy is something foreign, alien, that democracy is inappropriate for Russia; that freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of association is for others, that these are exceptional, culture-specific and hence ultimately irrelevant. Our success is a counter-example to the ideology of "managed" democracy. And as long as we thrive, we will be treated as a threat. At least as long as our neighbor adheres to the "managed democracy" model. After all, what threatens the legitimacy of a non-democratic state more than a counter-example, that in fact countries that were once under communist or soviet rule can in fact transform themselves into democracies?

III

In general, we are loath to get too involved in the internal affairs of other countries. The second half of the 20th Century saw a welcome diminution of this three hundred year old Westphalian principle, when human rights came to be seen as something that is not simply an internal matter of a nation state. Notions of sovereignty can change and today, how a government treats its subject is no longer something to be passed over in silence. We have not yet, however, been able to extend the idea that human rights are no state's internal matter to the broader issue of democracy in general.

I fear, however, that is short-sighted, for a lack of democracy is what underlies violations of human rights. But if that is insufficient for us to begin to consider lack of democracy as an issue of diplomacy, then at least it is time to realize that the absence of democracy is indeed beginning to threaten our security. As I just described, democracies on Russia's borders are viewed by that country as security threats, and policies against these perceived security threats are part of Russia's security policy. Which means, our democracies are a security issue for us, whether we like it or not. Even institutionally and multi-laterally, we see, as I mentioned, our most broad-based security organization, the OSCE is under attack for monitoring elections and passing judgment on whether they were free and fair, i.e., legitimate.

I believe that the time has arrived to understand that democracies need to be defended. Yes, those of us in the EU and NATO feel more secure than we did as democracies outside their shield of solidarity. But what about democracies not in either organization, Georgia, for example, or Ukraine or Moldova? What if by some small miracle a country even further afield in say Central Asia, opts for democracy? How do we defend their democratic choices? What can we do that democracies outside the fold of institutionalized solidarity can be as secure in their democratic choice as those on the inside?

EU membership, for a number of internal issues of the Union, wholly unrelated to Georgia or Ukraine themselves, is out of the question for at least a decade. NATO membership is an option, one that should be

considered, but what if a country doesn't qualify for NATO membership on other grounds, or if one of NATO's 26 member states for its own foreign policy agenda simply says no? We need to start thinking seriously about safe-guarding our won gains. It's a sad commentary, that no longer are we talking spreading democracy but defending it, but that unfortunately is what we have to do.

IV

Given all this, the question facing the Community of Democracies is *Chto delat?* Or what is to be done, as Lenin famously asked. One of the more vacuous and intellectually vapid answers we have heard for a number of years whenever the issue of Russian bullying of small democracies is, *But we cannot isolate Russia!* As if that is the only alternative out of a wide range of responses other than acceptance, acquiescence or even appeasement. Clearly principled selective isolation could be part of the menu: why should a Russia that is not a democracy, that does not even bother to meet its membership commitments continue to be a member of, indeed dominate that organization of European democracies, the Council of Europe? Why should the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe include parliamentarians elected in elections that were neither free nor fair? Why should a country that threatens its neighbors, threatens to target Europe with nuclear missiles continue to be a member of Industrialized Democracies, the G-8? What purpose is to be served when there is no effect of membership on Russian behaviour? Indeed, to what end, given that membership confers a form of legitimization and validation of a regime, whose legitimacy as a democracy at home is increasingly dubious?

But membership in legitimizing organizations such as the Council of Europe or the G-8 is a matter of institutional membership criteria, not day to day policy. More important not an either/or isolate or not isolate, it is what are the policy implications for the democracies. And here we see that the desire on our own part to make a quick buck or an easy Euro has come to set policy more than principle and a commitment to democracy, human rights and rule of law. More and more I find myself recalling another Lenin quote, about Western capitalists: *We will sell them the rope with which we shall hang them.*

It is clear that today, the prospect of quick and easy profits, opaque deals on natural gas (which moreover most likely violate EU rules on contracts and bundling) not to mention outright corruption of an order and at a level of government we have not seen in post WWII Europe, have undermined much of our ability to act. Europe's citizens are poisoned, Europe's countries are subjected to cyber war, their energy deliveries are halted, they are blackmailed and bribed, and now, threatened with a re-targeting of missiles.

As we see, we have allowed ourselves, through greed and naiveté, to allow our security to become beholden to the policies of an undemocratic, bullying petrol-state. But I believe we are reaching a decision point, at least as far the European Union is concerned. It has become increasingly

clear that two European goals are incompatible: European integration and appeasement of a roguelike and threatening Russia.

For Europe to function as a political entity, it needs the Constitutional Treaty. This treaty includes a robust foreign policy instrument, its Common Foreign and Security Policy, better known as the CFSP, which would drop the unanimity requirement in favour of qualified majority voting, abbreviated to QMV. This represents a considerable step forward in European policy-making, an absolute must if Europe is to have political clout commensurate with its economic might. But QMV of the CFSP will be accepted by all EU member states if and only if they are convinced no one will sell them out for a gas pipeline or some other dangling carrot that guarantees a lucrative sinecure for European leaders after they leave office.

Against this desire to forge a serious common foreign policy is a Russia, that specifically says in its recent foreign policy manifesto that it will seek bi-lateral ties instead of relations with the European Union qua Union, and counts instead for its foreign policy successes on European disunity.

For countries like mine as well as others that have come under Russian attack, boycotts or other forms of roguelike behaviour, this is a powerful stimulus for greater integration in the EU. But with the proviso, that Europe maintains solidarity, that going over to qualified majority does not allow the large to appease Russia at the expense of the small and the new.

From Europe and Russia we can generalize to the world at large, to other despotic regimes – Europe's deals with Saddam Hussein come to mind, along with the sad fact that making a buck, getting a contract for your own country's company far too often outweighs principle even in the best of democracies. We who belong to the community of liberal democracies need to understand that every lapse is ultimately a threat to our own security.

The choice, therefore, is ours: do we as democracies stand by our principles, do we trust each other enough to allow our foreign policy decisions to be made by a majority. Do we devise a policy that will defend the gains of democracy in countries like Georgia or Ukraine, who do not yet enjoy membership in either NATO or the EU. Do we dare to say that lack of press freedom, of suppression of peaceful dissent, lack of free and fair elections have consequences? Or do we continue in the pattern of the first half of this decade, looking for personal or national gain, the rest of the democratic European community be damned? This choice – our decision – is up only to us.