

## **THE CONTOURS OF THE FUTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WORLD'S CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to the opening of your conference here in St. Petersburg. It is an honour for me to speak before such a distinguished audience.

Today you will be discussing a question that is particularly pressing these days: what does the future hold in the context of the world's current cultural development?

This question, of course, is not easy to answer.

It is particularly difficult because the term 'culture' is very broad one. It is a term with many facets.

When we speak of 'culture' in the traditional, narrow sense, then it is to a certain extent universal. Whether it is in the music of Bach, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, or in the literature of Molière, Dostoevsky and great contemporary achievements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We talk about art as a widely recognised and lasting works of genius.

Research and science are on a similar level to art. In their quest for new knowledge and verifiable truths, they are by their very nature safe, stable parameters. And just like art, science and research transcend borders and unite nations.

At the same time, ideological concepts and worldviews are another expression and concrete manifestation of 'culture'. Such concepts find their expression, for example, in sociology, in business administration, economics and above all in politics.

This ideological form of 'culture' is not stable; it changes with the times.

In principle, change is not a bad thing. However, I would venture the following thesis: With this form of ‘culture’, we do not steadily move forward. Instead, we take two steps forward and, unfortunately, one step back. Over and over again.

I see the decades after the end of the Cold War as two steps forward. In the sense of ‘fraternity’ in Friedrich Schiller's ode ‘*An die Freude*’ (To Joy), a decisive common understanding developed. This understanding included peaceful interaction between countries and open borders for people, ideas and goods. It also led to democratic participation in shaping politics at the national level and to a social market economy which distributed prosperity widely.

It is not my intention to evaluate this time through rose-coloured glasses, but I feel that what is happening today is a step backwards. In the context of globalisation, the cards are being reshuffled in a wide range of areas.

It is almost frightening, for example, to see how scientific knowledge and scientific progress are called into question today. In fact, a fundamentally anti-scientific attitude is spreading - at least in certain social circles - especially in the so-called developed countries.

A field of tension has emerged between faith and evidence:

- Alternative medicine, New Age thinking and sectarianism instead of hard facts in the health sector.
- Climate change and its already emerging consequences are seen as the fake news of politically instrumentalised scientists.
- Increasingly complex statistical procedures and methods provide an even more complex variety of data. The scope for interpretation is correspondingly wide.

The international community is in a difficult situation. The commonalities of countries under the umbrella of the United Nations and its Millennium Goals (such as

the ‘globalisation of human rights’) are increasingly taking a back seat to nation-state arguments.

It is clear: in an increasingly globalised world, the nation state is straightforward. The nation state creates an identity that people find easier to relate. The concept of an international community is a lot more complicated. But how far can this constant competition between nation states take us? For those who win this competition, things may initially seem to be all very well. However, two things should be kept in mind:

First, a victory can also be a Pyrrhic victory.

Second, world history teaches us that tensions between countries underpinned by nationalist tendencies are an extremely explosive expression of different ‘cultures’.

Ladies and gentlemen – I take the liberty of telling you all this as a representative of small, quadrilingual and neutral Switzerland. For us, dialogue was and is the irreplaceable instrument for success at national and international level.

Accordingly, we are proud of the fact that CERN was founded on Swiss territory in 1953. During the Cold War, it served as a neutral meeting place, completely independent of political adversity. And its achievements were not only scientific in nature.

And it is precisely with all of this in mind that I express my hope that we will soon be able to take two steps forward again towards a common ‘culture’.

I am convinced that the Russian and in particular the St. Petersburg humanities and social sciences will make a significant contribution to this.

Here, in this city, several generations of people have had extraordinary experiences. These experiences predestine you to help reduce tensions and to actively participate

in open dialogue, especially about common human values and a broad-based 'culture'. A certain degree of national pride must and should be permitted of course. But when pride turns into an expression of the Latin word '*superbia*', it becomes, if not sin, then at least a danger.

In any case, I hope that the future will not bring us a world of small, competing islands, but rather a large, interconnected world with many different facets.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.