

**SPEECH BY DR. DANILO TÜRK ON THE OCCASION OF  
ACCEPTANCE OF THE HONORARY DOCTORATE OF CORVINUS  
UNIVERSITY, Budapest, 12 February 2015**

Honorable Rector Magnificus, Professor Rostoványi Zsolt,  
Honorable Professors, Dear Students,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with deep feelings of honor and humility that I accept the Honorary Doctorate of the Corvinus University in Budapest. The academic excellence of Corvinus University and its many achievements in teaching and research give special importance to this high and noble title. I promise to continue to work with diligence and commitment worthy of the honorary title you have bestowed on me.

My work has been essentially devoted to two objectives - human rights and common good. Admittedly, this description sounds ambitious. However, I have always understood that practical achievement comes only as a result of cooperative effort of many individuals. My work has been done as the work of one among many and in cooperation with many others. And it has been inspired by the great ideals of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

For a society to thrive as a whole it is imperative that the dignity and worth of each individual be respected. But respect of the individual does not, in itself, guarantee his or her well being.

No man is an island, we all have to understand our common destiny and the need for our cooperative effort for the common good. Individual freedom and common good are two sides of the same coin.

In our part of the world, in Central Europe, these basic realizations had to travel a long way towards their actual acceptance. Our lands have experienced foreign domination and tyranny, as well as disrespect for ethnic identity. The nations of Central Europe had to fight for the recognition of their languages and often the political arrangements of Europe left large parts of these nations in the status of national minorities.

The struggle for human rights and common good in our part of the world required a fine understanding of the interplay between the rights of each individual and collective identities of nations, and why the latter are often an important vehicle for the realization of the former.

However, there have been many instances of abuse and misuse. In long periods of history, it was not uncommon that aggressive nationalism abused collective identities at the expense of individual liberty. And sometimes individual liberty was interpreted in such a way as to deny the relevance of linguistic, cultural or religious features - the collective identities that define individuals in a variety of important ways.

A large part of my work has been devoted to the study of the problems of national minorities and seeking practical solutions. In this effort, I have met many distinguished scholars and practitioners from Corvinus University and from other institutions in Hungary. Together we have been able to contribute to finding practical solutions.

Today, the rights and status of the Hungarian minority in Slovenia and the Slovene minority in Hungary represent good examples of a successful and creative combination of individual rights and collective identities. This should be recognized in the wider European space as a significant contribution to the betterment of human condition in our - geographically small, but culturally and politically intense - part of the world.

Language, culture, religion - and ethnicity in the broadest sense of the word - are among important aspects of the effort for human rights and common good. But they are not enough. The history of the past decades has demonstrated that the most fundamental requirements of social organization continue to be topical - and often a problem not easy to resolve. Legitimacy of state power and sovereignty of the state belong to such fundamental requirements.

A generation ago, the people of Slovenia found themselves in an existential crisis amid the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In that situation it became clear that the way forward requires our exercise of the right to self-determination aiming at creation of our own sovereign state. The plebiscite in Slovenia in late 1990 pronounced that orientation without the slightest shadow of doubt.

But as in any attempt towards larger freedom we had to ask ourselves: Freedom **from** what? Freedom **for** what? For those of us who have already devoted our academic work and our political engagement to the cause of human rights the answer was clear. The nation has to free itself from practices of restraint and denial of human rights and has to create a system in which human rights will be respected and will guide the entire society and its development.

Very soon we discovered that building such a system is a task that takes time and is more complex than we had imagined. We became more - albeit not necessarily fully - aware of the importance of state sovereignty in the context of building of a just society that respects human rights.

Once again we have to master the art of combining individual freedom and collective need. The struggle for the understanding that common good is a prerequisite for the full realization of individual's human rights will never end. It only changes forms and priorities.

As a newly established state Slovenia had to accomplish many tasks in a short period of time. We had to establish peaceful and cooperative relations with our neighbors. We had to secure political stability and economic progress at home. And, above all, we have to constantly improve the operation of the rule of law.

*Iustitia est regni fundamentum* - this is an old piece of wisdom that has only gained importance over the course of history. The principle of the rule of law is a point of departure for a long journey and constant effort for improvement. Today, in Slovenia, we find ourselves in the middle of a historically important effort – the effort for respect of the rule of law and for the necessary quality and authority of courts of law. We are in the middle of a battle to diminish and eradicate corruption and to build a legal framework that will enable greater prosperity and fairness in social development in our country.

These are difficult and complex tasks and they require skillful and ethically based use of all the instruments of state. We are re-learning the lesson of the importance of state sovereignty in our post modern era. The notion that modern societies have moved beyond sovereignty rings hollow under these

circumstances. Quite to the contrary, addressing the problems of our time requires sophisticated use of state sovereignty, perhaps even more than before.

Protection of human rights against terrorism and organized crime requires an effective and sophisticated sovereign state and responsible international cooperation. Political upheavals, disruptions of constitutional order and the resulting collapse of states in several parts of the world require mature political judgment and collective treatment that only sovereign states can collectively guarantee. The cases of use of force by non state actors and by states and the resulting humanitarian problems demand responsible use of the existing international instruments, in particular the United Nations. And as we are all well aware, the United Nations is based on the sovereign equality of its member states.

The international order as well as our security and well being today vitally depend on the good functioning of the sovereign states. There is no reason to believe that tomorrow will be much different. The member states of the European Union have, indeed, transferred the exercise of many of their sovereign rights to the Union. However, they remain, as sovereign states, ultimately responsible for the functioning of their Union.

At present, the European Union is characterized by prolonged economic and financial problems - as well as by high unemployment, in particular youth unemployment, in many EU countries. This has opened the question of social sustainability of several states. The danger of stagnation and even unraveling of the European Union is real. And again, responsible exercise of state sovereignty of all EU member states, large and small, old and new, creditors and debtors, is critically important for the future of the Union and of our continent.

Much of my academic and practical, diplomatic work has been devoted to the questions of the functioning of the sovereignty of states. Based on experience and academic insight, I can confidently conclude that state sovereignty, that old and well tested legal and political concept, remains the cornerstone of our future. Protection of human rights and our identities, our security and our prosperity vitally depend on that. International order, international peace and security depend on that. Obviously, the exercise of sovereignty today requires a high level of sensitivity and accountability to the people within sovereign states as well as a high level of responsible cooperation internationally. This general conclusion calls for further work. Academic rigor, political engagement and diplomatic sophistication will continue to be of high value. I hope to be able to make a contribution in this context.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We meet today in Budapest under the roof of a proud academic institution that bears the name of King Matthias Corvinus. In the collective memory of people in Slovenia, King Matthias (Kralj Matjaž, in our language) continues to live as a symbol of political wisdom, of the effective protection of security of the people and, yes, very important, a symbol of low taxes and fair government. Let this symbol continue to inspire us all.

And let me, once again express my profound gratitude for the honor you have bestowed on me and conclude with the wish for the future prosperity of Corvinus University: *Vivat Academia! Vivat, crescat, floreat!*