

EU: Reinventing Itself – Women Empowerment and Inclusion

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Being Open While Addressing Threats of Terror and Security Concerns

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Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Terror and violence dominate the media while new threats continue to alarm the international community. To find or determine various causes and effects, and perhaps, how these present problems might be dealt with. What solutions we have to offer? What counter terrorism strategies will work? What steps we can take to tackle the 21st Century challenges? What are the root causes of terrorism and security concerns? In this turmoil and chaos, can we build a transparent, open and equitable world in which threats of terror and security concerns can be contained? Can rivalries and hatred be turned around for cooperation, freedom and Rule of Law?

Openness and Threats of Terror and Security Concerns

The subject of my address today is openness, particularly openness about the security threats facing us here in Europe, and around the world.

It occurs to me that true “openness” in our world is ever harder to find.

I’ve noticed that nowadays, people who profess to speak “openly”, often do so only to express sweeping generalisations about very large groups of people.

“All Muslims are the same,” they tell us.

Or: “All women think the same way.”

Or even: “Indians are good at maths.”

Many people seem to find comfort in such generalisations, because they are a shortcut...

...a lazy way to avoid hard thinking about all the human complexity that faces us...

...A cheap way of winning applause...

...An expression of one’s own frustration at what one has just read in the newspaper, or seen on TV.

If I could offer one axiom for debate in the modern world, it would be this: never generalise about large groups of people. It is the fastest way to being certainly wrong!

Our leaders seem eager to encourage us to think in these generalisations.

When Barack Obama was sworn into his second term four years ago, he said, and I quote:

“Our brave men and women in uniform are unmatched in skill and courage.”

Another generalisation, this time one guaranteed to win Obama the approval of his audience.

But is what he said true?

Every month that passes we see incidents of uniformed Americans acting in ways that are neither skilled nor courageous.

Of police officers responding brutishly towards unarmed civilians who pose them no threat.

Of generals dabbling in political affairs, eyeing for themselves positions of power and influence in the next Cabinet.

Yet to point this out publicly – to quibble with the generalisation of military perfection – is not a wise strategy for politicians in the United States, regardless of their party affiliation.

It’s just too easy for their opponents to portray more honest commentary as unpatriotic, even seditious.

The easy, heart-warming generalisation has become more to important our public discourse, than the messy, complex standards of truthfulness.

Too often, even the news we read is painted in these broad, misleading strokes.

The fragmentation of the media between thousands of competing websites has placed ever more pressure on journalists to dabble in emotive generalisation.

Linking Generalisation, Manipulation and Unstable World

Generalising about large groups of people, and then portraying those groups as opposing one another, is an effective means of generating “click bait”... those headlines that you know you should ignore, but are tempted to read anyway.

So we see headlines from the past year, such as:

“The 10 Worst Anti-Cop Signs At Black Lives Matter Rallies”

and

“Men-only Muslim swimming pools are an insult to a United Kingdom built on equality”

Perhaps you would agree with me when I suggest that the drumbeat of conflict and violence can be heard beneath these kinds of headlines.

This is not the kind of “openness” that will keep us safe.

It is the “openness” of those who are emotional and afraid, and who are responding to these fears in the so-called “fight or flight” mode that is humanity’s most basic, default response to threats.

Exploiting this fight-or-flight mentality has become a career for many well-educated people.

Today, journalists are easily outnumbered by public-relations operatives, lobbyists and media consultants.

Their job is not to be open about the truth. It is to limit the damage the truth could inflict to the companies that employ them.

They have many tools at their disposal.

They have the money to wine and dine journalists whose pay has not kept pace with other professions.

They have access to lawyers, who can threaten the press with court action.

And they control the advertising revenue that has become so to media outlets, amid a rapid decline of direct sales of newspapers.

All this raises a troubling thought.

We know we are being manipulated on an industrial scale.

And we know that many parts of the world are becoming ever more unstable.

Could the two be linked?

Why is it that many Western institutions seem shocked by President Donald Trump, not because of his contempt for women or minority groups, but because he dares to suggest that Russia isn't the threat we're told it is?

When there are so many good reasons to criticise Trump, why is he attracting so much criticism for his views on Vladimir Putin?

One answer would be to say, well, Trump is a deplorable human being, so everything he says must be wrong.

But isn't that just another easy generalisation? After all, even a broken clock is right twice a day.

And it does not explain why quite so much official attention has been paid to Trump's relationship with Russia, and why his views on this issue above all others have been so furiously denounced by senior U.S. military and intelligence officials.

Could it be that something else is going on?

Could it be that there are financial interests at stake, here?

Threats and Increased Military Spending

In December, Trump issued Tweets in which he condemned what he called the "tremendous cost and cost overruns" of the Lockheed Martin F-35, a new fighter jet. Trump suggested that the U.S. go back to using Boeing's older F-18 model.

Even Trump's most vigorous detractors must surely concede that on this issue, he has a point.

According to the U.S. military, the F-35 project had its origins in the late 1980s, as an attempt to produce what it called an "affordable" strike aircraft.

It initiated a competition between defence contractors such as McDonnell Douglas, General Dynamics and Lockheed to produce the aircraft.

But life was very different in the 1980s. In those days, we were told, the Soviet Union presented us all with an existential threat that required we match the USSR's hi-tech and expensive military equipment.

The Soviet Union crumbled a few years after the beginning of the project.

But for some reason, the F-35 programme did not.

Like a zombie, it lurched onwards, sucking in taxpayers' resources not only from the United States but also from allies - even the Netherlands!

Decades later, these aircraft are not yet in use, and the program became more and more expensive. The sums involved are now barely conceivable.

In March 2016, *TIME* magazine reported the total cost of the F-35 over its lifetime.

It put the figure at 1.45 trillion dollars.

Let me repeat that: 1.45 *trillion* dollars.

Can we honestly say Trump's Tweet condemning this programme was wrong?

The Tweet had some interesting effects. It wiped USD4 billion off the share values of Lockheed Martin, the main contractor.

How did the media respond to this?

Fortune magazine accused Trump of "making holes" in the stock market.

David A. Graham, writing in *The Atlantic* magazine, insinuated that Trump was merely manipulating the stock market for his own personal gain. He offered no proof of this.

Daniel Fisher, writing in *Forbes*, accused Trump of "bullying tactics" against Lockheed, and of ignoring the brilliance of the company's technology.

But Fisher said Trump's "bullying" wouldn't work, Fisher said, because Lockheed has cleverly sourced the parts for the F-35 from 45 of America's 50 states, buying congress in the process.

Soon afterwards, the media was covered by salacious allegations about Trump's activities in a Russian hotel room, sourced from a former British spy, who sourced these in turn from anonymous contacts whose reliability is impossible to verify.

The press admitted it couldn't prove the claims. It reported them anyway.

One does not need to admire Donald Trump to be concerned by this.

It's why the concept of "openness" is so crucial to assessing what we're being told.

For me, "openness" is about intellectual bravery.

It takes bravery to be the person who is prepared to disagree with his/her colleagues, friends and family, in order to champion complexity over generalisation.

It requires bravery, to be the person who says that although Trump is wrong and offensive in many ways, he might not be wrong about Russia, or the outdated Soviet-era weapons and alliances such as NATO.

It requires bravery to be the person who says that not all Muslims are pursuing the same agenda, and that not all aspects of Western civilization are superior, and that not all our men and women in uniform are brave and noble.

So in the spirit of openness, let us each try to summon up the intellectual and moral energy to confront the complexity of our world, rather than hiding within the wisdom of crowds and behind the false generalities into which, too often, we seem to be herding ourselves.

Only then, can we find the complex solutions to our complex challenges.

Conclusion and Way Forward

To contain threats of terror and security concerns, we need counter terrorism strategy addressing root causes of terrorism and security concerns by building transparent, equitable international institutions.

Security threats are hyped up to create fear in the public and for military to get more money for weapons and military hardware. There are military advisors whose job is to bump up non existing threats into near real ones. There are no peace advisors to any Presidents, Prime Ministers or any governments in the world. There should be as a routine people of authority whose job should be to give alternative peace solutions to the conflicts. That will surely make the world a safer place.

So the strategy for openness is dialogue, diplomacy and cooperation between governments, corporations and civil society for addressing threats and security concerns

Thank you.

This speech can be downloaded from www.unitingforpeace.com

The materials and excerpts have been taken from the following sources:

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