



Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear speakers and organisers of this event, dear guests,

it is my great honour to open other international conference of the Institute of European Democrats taking place in Slovakia, today for the first time organized in a beautiful historical city of Košice.

For the beginning, I would like to introduce our Institute in short so you know who we are and what we are working on. Institute of European Democrats is a European political foundation of the European Parliament, it was established in 2007 with the support of the European Institutions as an innovative, non-profit, political and cultural research institute based in Brussels and funded by the European Parliament. This August, IED received the European legal status, so alongside other political foundations of the European Parliament we now officially form the European legal personality, which is a very positive and huge step forward for us. Through our activities we network with many significant experts, politicians and analysts and contribute to global debate on the most important and challenging issues of today's world. We work hard to deliver quality policy proposals and suggestions how to improve the functioning of the EU and eliminate the threats our liberal democratic order is still facing nowadays.

Precisely the topic we are going to discuss here today represents one of the greatest challenges for the European Union in its history. Whether we want to admit it or not, European Union truly stands between its profound democratic heritage and the danger of strengthening political radicalism today. Political extremism in Europe, which we have believed was defeated in 1945, is again seriously threatening the countries and peoples of our continent. Practically in every EU Member State we can now witness the rise of popularity of political forces that do not respect liberal democracy and European project and instead they call for the return of Europe of nation states and base their policies on xenophobia, hatred or racism.

In recent years, these radical political forces have entered the national or regional parliaments, or even the governments in several EU countries as well as the European Parliament itself. Freedom Party in the Netherlands, Front National in France, Law and Justice in Poland, Freedom Party in Austria, Fidesz and Jobbik in Hungary, True Finns in Finland,... and we could continue. Only few days ago, we were shocked seeing that Alternative for Germany is the first right-wing extremist party to enter the German Parliament since the end of the Second World War. It is extremely worrying that the people of the country which based its



post-war legacy on fighting against any form of extremism in politics, voted for such party. A huge problem is that not only frustrated voters from socially disadvantaged background support extremist parties, but more and more intellectuals, academicians, or political elites have started to vote for them too. Taking into account all these negative developments, it is our obligation to organize the events like this one today and discuss these problems together.

I believe that today's event will contribute to the analysis of the reasons for the current successes of radical politicians, explain who is responsible for this trend, and how we should address it in the most effective way. Several distinguished experts and social scientists from Slovakia and abroad have honoured us by their presence today and I sincerely thank them for accepting our invitation and come to this conference to talk about his very difficult and serious issue. Because I am convinced that discussion and sharing of knowledge are the most important ways how to eliminate the rise of political extremism in the EU – it is necessary to talk about this problem, to explain to the people why extremists are so dangerous for the society, explain to them that Europe already experienced this trend in 1930s and it led to the bloodiest conflict in human history; we need to explain that voting for radicals who abuse the fears of people and combine Eurosceptic, anti-migrant and racist positions with populist rhetoric and unrealistic promises is not the solution but quite opposite. Europe needs to proceed towards more cooperation instead of competition, discussions instead of disputes and integration instead of divisions that were at the roots of long centuries of the conflicts among European nations. We must defeat the rise of political populism and extremism in Europe and protect the European Union, which is the only guarantee of peace, safety, prosperity and development for our continent.

I would like to also thank to Member of the Parliament, Mrs Alena Bašistová, who honoured us today by her presence and who will be a wonderful moderator of this conference. I would like to thank to Mr Antonio Parziale, Honorary Consul and Honorary Member of Young Europeans, our Slovak member organization, for organizing this event with us.

Thank you very much for your attention and thank you very much for coming here today though which you show that you are not careless about the world you live in which is a crucial and very important step done by you.

Thank you.