

The speech of José Manuel Durão Barroso, the President of the European Commission

50th anniversary of Hungarian Revolution
Budapest, 23 October 2006

President,

Prime Minister,

Madam Speaker

Chairman of the 1956 Committee,

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highnesses,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a deep honour that, as President of the European Commission, I have been invited to speak at this commemoration of Hungary's 1956 Revolution; an invitation which I regard as a recognition by modern Hungary of the role of the European Union.

On 23 October 1956, Hungarians chose freedom. In doing so, they offered hope and dignity to a whole people.

This extraordinary act of courage was to have deeper, longer consequences than might have been foreseen. The heroes of 1956 fought for their own good, and that of their country. They also fought for everyone in Europe who was living under dictatorship.

Fifty years ago, Hungarians stood up and stated: without freedom, life is intolerable.

The Communist response to this brave stand is well known.

More than 2,500 Hungarians were killed and thousands were wounded. Over 20,000 were imprisoned, and hundreds of these were later executed. At least 200,000 Hungarians fled the country, all over Europe and beyond. The support some received in their adopted homelands is a good example of what solidarity really means.

The inheritance of the heroes of 1956 is one which all of us today should be grateful for.

The 1956 Revolution showed that the Soviet response to freedom was oppression, murder and lies. The Revolution lit a torch of freedom; a flame that went underground to sustain opposition movements across Europe's dictatorships. A flame that surfaced again in the Prague Spring in 1968, that lit the way for the collapse of dictatorship in Greece, Portugal and Spain. It found its heirs with the foundation of Solidarnosc in 1980, in Poland. And it inspired those who fought for freedom until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The 1956 Revolution also laid the foundations for the enlarged European Union of today. The Treaty of Rome, signed 6 months after the revolution, launched what is now the European Union. But it was an incomplete Union. Because just as the extreme right wing dictatorships prevented the countries of southern Europe from joining, so the Communist dictatorship prevented so many countries from central Europe taking their rightful place in the European Community.

But despite that historical injustice, the 1956 Revolution was a revolution for freedom and democracy. Those are values which lie at the heart of the European Union. We must never take these values for granted. Because to take fundamental freedoms for granted is to put them at risk. We only have to look at what is happening today to freedom of expression and thought to realise that this danger exists.

The courage of the - often anonymous - heroes of 1956 led to the foundation of new democracies and the reunification of Europe. Finally, two Europes became one again, and together, we have been able to repair the scar which ran across Europe. Hungary has found its home in an area of freedom and solidarity: the European Union.

So 23 October 1956 was a revolution in the truest sense. It was a revolution through action, and a revolution in ideas. We are still benefiting from its impact today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Following World War II, a new world order was shaped in Yalta. Europe was divided. We cannot go back in time and right past wrongs. But we can build a better future.

Transitions are never easy, but Hungary's achievements over the past 16 years are substantial. To embed them, reform must continue. The people of Hungary now have a great opportunity in their grasp. By uniting, with purpose, they will be able to reap the full benefits that membership of the European Union offers.

The legacy of the 1956 Revolution, and of those who were inspired by it to lead the peaceful transformation of Hungary in 1989, is democracy. And the consequence of democracy is that for political problems, there are always political solutions.

Joining the EU in May 2004 did not mark the end of a process, it marked the start. And the whole European family is ready to assist one of its members, as it has done already in so many other countries.

The benefits of enlargement flow both ways. Europe needs Hungary, too. A Europe with Hungary is a larger Europe, a stronger Europe, and a more influential Europe. It is a Europe enriched by Hungary's unique cultural contribution, which stretches back more than a thousand years.

What is true for Hungary is true for all the new member states. My message to all of you here today, some with a similar past that of Hungary, is that an enlarged Europe is necessary for a powerful Europe.

The message of acting together is not just one for today's Hungary. It applies to today's Europe. We need to act together to create an open, generous, determined Europe; a Europe

which can take on the challenges of the future. Challenges which are shared by us all, and which no one country can solve by itself.

When we act together, we can show the world that it is possible to build a better future.

And that's a message that I think the heroes of 1956 would recognise.

I started by saying thank you. Let me finish by saying thank you. Az Európai Unió Köszönti a Magyar Hősöket. The European Union salutes the Hungarian heroes. Thank you; to the heroes of 1956 who are here, and to those who died, for what they have left us; a Europe reunited, a Europe of freedom and democracy. Their sacrifice was not in vain.

Thank you.