

**Address on the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of
the Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight
Budapest, 22 October, 2006**

Speech as delivered

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I sincerely thank you, Mr. President Sólyom for the honour of having me on this event where we celebrate this outstandingly important event of the Hungarian and European history, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

We commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956 against dictatorship and foreign rule – a revolution for democracy and freedom.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 20th century was an era of dynamism and dramatic events that has brought about major progress and positive changes in great many areas of our societies. However, it also brought about two world wars with unprecedented numbers of victims, inhumanity even to the level of barbarism, the sins of Hitler and Stalin, the Holocaust and other dark hours.

After the defeat of Hitler and the victory of the Allied Forces, Europe became divided in the middle of the 20th century.

The liberation of 1945 was real liberation for Western Central Europe. Germany was eventually divided into two.

However, the drama of the war was followed by Stalinist dictatorship in the territories controlled by the Red Army.

I think that the personalities of Hitler and Stalin cannot be compared as similar, however, the internal logic of the totalitarian systems showed some terrifying similarities under Hitler and Stalin. This year we celebrate the 100th birthday of Hannah Arendt, who elaborated on the essence of these two totalitarian systems and their similarities with tremendous scientific precision in her major work 'The Origins of Totalitarianism'.

I. Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Guests,

The death of Stalin in March 1953 was a historical date that involved a shimmer of hope also for Hungary. The Austrian State Treaty and certain developments in Poland strengthened these hopes. The Hungarian people wanted more freedom, more democracy, and the termination of occupation by the Soviets. This desire for freedom of the Hungarian people that had been received by the then ruling powers with insecurity, dishonesty and controversy,

developed within the shortest time from the first spontaneous protests and demonstrations into a major movement that shattered the old system quite seriously. The fall of the Stalin statute in Budapest was a lot more than just a symbolic act.

The continuation of the events is known to all, and I do not have to describe them: First there were high hopes, great joy and trust that all would end well.

Then came the shock over military intervention to defeat the revolution.

The shock over the brutality of armoured communism.

What I can add, though, are my strong personal memories of the events in Hungary in 1956, and the intensive involvement of the international community in what happened in this neighbouring country.

Even today, I am proud of the spontaneous opening of the Austrian borders that allowed almost 200,000 people to flee from Hungary into freedom.

And there is one thing that remains absolutely certain: The revolution and freedom fight were not in vain. It could prove the courage and love for freedom of the Hungarian nation. The military victors of 1956 proved to be moral losers in the end.

Because what was drowned in blood in 1956 was then unstoppable, and could be achieved peacefully in 1989. After all, democracy was stronger than dictatorship.

And today, 50 years after October of 1956, Hungary is an equal and valued member of the European family.

I would like to congratulate you on that personally, and the whole of Europe congratulates you on this, too.

Mr President,

Finally we must ask whether we have learnt anything from history, and what is it. I am convinced that the positive development of Austria after 1945 has been – amongst others – made possible by the fact that we could learn from the mistaken developments of the past.

One of these lessons is for example the recognition that, in a democracy, the political opponent is not an enemy.

No party is the exclusive holder of the truth. No party is infallible.

The border between good and bad does not lie between democratic parties, so that one of them is exclusively good,

and the other only bad, but it lays rather between single individuals, or even within an individual him- or herself.

Parties are important, but the fatherland is even more important!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe is looking at Hungary in these days with honour and respect to Hungary and the love for freedom of Hungarians.

In this spirit I bow my head with respect before the victims of the Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight of the year 1956, and I wish the entire Hungarian nation and us all a good, peaceful and joint future.

Thank you.