

OPENING REMARKS

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THE FUTURE OF EUROPE SUMMIT—BRUSSELS, 05 FEBRUARY 2018

Good afternoon.

I'd like to welcome you to **The Future of Europe Summit: How a Radical Centre Can Deliver a Continent of Reform and Renewal**. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Paul Hofheinz. I am the president and co-founder of The Lisbon Council. Together with **Fipra** and **Radix** – a new UK think tank that we'll surely be hearing more about this afternoon – we will be your hosts here today.

Before we start, a few housekeeping measures:

---If you have a cell phone, please put your phone on silent for the duration of the session.

---If you're tweeting, and we encourage you to do so, the hashtag is

#lisboncouncil

---We will let the Session run until 16h30. Afterwards, there will be a reward: a cocktail will be served in the foyer.

---The Session is on the record; there are journalists present in the room

---For the journalists here, we would appreciate, as a courtesy, if you do quote from one of the speakers that you mention that they were speaking at a Lisbon Council event in Brussels.

What's up with Europe? That's what we are here to discuss today. Before we move on to the difficult parts, let me mention a few happy facts briefly. The European economy grew at 2.5% in 2017 – the highest rate since 2007, and a rate that outstrips the United States. Unemployment, too, is looking better, down to 7.3% in the EU-28, the lowest rate since 2008. Though it remains too abnormally high, particularly among the young, and particularly in places like Spain, Greece and our inner cities. Capital spending, meanwhile, is rising. It is up to 3.7%, a full percentage point higher than last year and an important sign of business confidence. It is an indication that many believe that life – at least here in Europe – will be better in the days to come.

But something is up – something is not quite right. And it's that something that we are here to discuss today. Because the truth is, even with the recent

economic success, the years 2016 and 2017 gave us all pause to reflect. It wasn't so much that the great pendulum of politics swung so wildly in those years, seeing governments handed from one party to another in a ritual dating back hundreds of years to the Greeks and the Vikings. Rather, it was who was swinging the pendulum, where the pendulum was heading, and what those swings said about the very foundation of post-war prosperity – and the pillars of liberal democracy – upon which so much of that success rests.

I'm talking about what is usually called populism. And what exactly is this populism? Well, in its purest, rawest form, it's an effort to divide society against itself. It aims to give simple answers to complex problems. And even worse – it often gives the wrong answers. It gives answers which could themselves easily become self-fulfilling prophecies, and bring about the very dystopia that they claim to see around us each and every day.

But we're not without some success on this front here in Europe. People have forgotten, but when the historians get around to telling this story, they will remember that Europe was the gate at which the barbarians were put to rest. The Dutch elections in 2017 were the first. That could have gone a very different way. But so were the French elections, and we have one of the

leading architects of *En Marche* – one of the most successful efforts to build a governing majority around a progressive agenda in recent times – here with us today.

How then do you govern in times like these? How do you campaign? The European Commission has given us five scenarios in a recent White Paper – ranging from “carrying on” to “doing much more together.” We’ll surely discuss some of those scenarios today. But the question I want to put on the table, the one I’d like to address to each of our speakers, and to you in the audience as well, is, how do we shore up the political centre? How do we make that centre something more than just a call to preserve the current status quo? How do we turn it into a driver and a vehicle of change? How do we turn it into something that will give our democracy the strength it needs to last from generation to generation, and allow us to continue into this difficult 21st century with the confidence we see starting to manifest itself so clearly today.

These are difficult questions, and I can think of no better speaker to kick us off than Nick Clegg. Mr Clegg – whom we welcome to the Lisbon Council today for the first time – studied Social Anthropology at Cambridge before getting an advanced degree in European politics at the College of Europe in Bruges. He

speaks five languages fluently – French, German, Spanish, Dutch and English.

And he has impeccable European credentials: a member of Cabinet for Sir Leon Brittan, vice president of the European Commission; a member of the European Parliament for East Midlands (where he became the first liberal democrat elected to that post since the 1930s). Later, he became member of parliament for Sheffield Hallam; leader of the liberal democrats; and eventually Deputy Prime Minister.

Nick, it's an honour and a pleasure to have you with us here today. Please share with us your vision of renewed, revitalized Europe – and maybe you'll say a few words as well about how you see the United Kingdom – and progressives like yourselves – within it?