



SERGUEI KARAGANOV

Chairman of the Presidium of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy

I would prefer to live in Europe with the vivacity and energy of Asia. That is, of course, the hope of anybody who wants to live in a good world. As for the subject of today's debate, many of the issues have been covered, but I have a few things to add. First of all, we have been talking about the decay of Europe and some core decay of leadership in Europe. That is not true, because we have Thierry de Montbrial here. I mean, come on, he has been doing that against all odds for five years, during the world economic crisis. Who on earth believed that he would have done that with, of course, all of his colleagues? I mean, we were all smiling and applauding him, but this thing is happening for the first time. Obviously, the energy at the conference is increasing. It brings new people. It brings new ideas and here we are. Leadership is alive. That is my first comment on the conference.

Second, I have been thinking about world affairs and recently one thought has been coming to my mind. I will formulate it here. We are living through the second unfreezing of the international arena of social scene and we have to prevent the third. The first unfreezing came after the collapse of communism with all of these conflicts on the borders of the former Soviet Union and the iron curtain. We had ugly things in the Balkans and we had an ugly war in Chechnya. This wave of unfreezing was hopefully stopped after the war in Georgia. However, we are now having the second unfreezing, because the structure that has been imposed on the world by the governments of the west is crumbling, because the west is retreating. It could not afford to dominate as it used to dominate and so we see the unfreezing of conflicts, not only of conflicts, but also the will of the people, in the Middle East. All of these governments that were, by the way, civil and secular, have become imposed with the help of the west.

But I am frightened by the possible third wave of unfreezing. That is why calls for more democracy in modern Europe send shivers down my spine.

I remember Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, who at the end of socialism was calling for more socialism in my country. It is not that democracy could be killed off in Europe – that is a senseless idea – but the core problem for Europe is not a financial or other problem but something which has not been dealt with or even named, which is the decline in competitiveness of Europe on the world market because of the increase in competition elsewhere. While northern Europe, and Germany first of all, has been able to introduce structural reforms and has remained competitive, most of Europe has not been able to do so. The problem is that it will have to adapt to the new realities and it would not be possible to adapt to the new realities without changing its political systems. When I hear about more democracy, that means that you will not be able to adapt to a more effective competitive world than the one we are facing.

To think about this, Europe will have to go through not just economic but also political and social changes. Otherwise it will start to collapse, and we should all fear the third unfreezing, which is the real weakening of Europe and the reemergence of Catastrophic European nationalism.

In conclusion, the conference has been a great success, first of all, because it did not deal with geopolitics. However, it is all about geopolitics – geopolitics is back. It was also a success because it brought us good news. That is exactly why this conference has been so successful. It brought Africa to us, which has become successful and is not a basket case but a hope. Presidents from Africa and people who are thinking and doing in Africa have been quite an eye-opener for many of us who have heard about Africa but had not yet witnessed what was happening there. That was a great success of the conference and something new that I will bring back home to think about.