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On the Occasion of the Launch of EU*Connect

Interactive digital Campus for Participants from Ukraine, France and Germany

About four months ago, we signed online the Memorandum of Understanding between CIFE and Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. Speaking in front of an audience from Ukraine remains something special every time. While attacks are once again being carried out on Kyiv, it has been calm here in Western Europe for 70 years. Nor could the contrast be greater than the difference in values between Moscow on the one hand and the EU and its partners on the other. Putin said a few days ago that he was "satisfied" with the drone attacks. How is it possible to be satisfied with death and destruction? It is a moral aberration. The distinction between Kyiv and the current Russian regime lies in values like freedom, sovereignty and democracy, but, above all, there is a fundamentally different understanding of the value of a human person. For the Soviets, a human being was the result of a division of one million divided by one million, effectively meaning worthless. In the eyes of the Putin regime, this applies not only to a Ukrainian life but equally to that of a Russian soldier. The dead are numbers. For us, every human being is sacred. Every human being counts. The time of radical nationalism is over in the EU. No one dreams anymore of the empires of yesteryear. We have been living in a new era for seventy years. The people of Ukraine will one day participate in that longing for 'eternal peace'. I wanted to say that from the start in this short message.

The battlefield lies within your legal national borders but the consequences extend worldwide. If we have to talk about scarcity of food and energy today, its origin lies in the 24 February invasion. If we talk about high inflation and the impending recession and unemployment in almost all countries, one should not look far for the culprits. Facts are the greatest enemy of prejudices, interests and ideologies. Rarely has negative interdependence been so strongly demonstrated. The local and the global touch each other. The spread of misery is also why, at the UN General Assembly, 143 out of 193 countries supported a resolution affirming Ukraine's sovereignty within its internationally recognised borders. Along with Russia, only four other countries voted against it: Belarus, Syria, Nicaragua and North Korea. I would not like to have those rogue states as friends! For many countries, there are limits to what is unjust and illegal.

The duty of rulers is the welfare and happiness of their citizens. People want to live a normal daily life for themselves, their children, their parents, their families. They have a right to that. Nostalgic nationalism wants them to believe that their happiness depends on the greatness of the State. A certain form of geopolitics disregards human values. It is preoccupied with abstractions that have nothing to do with real life. There needs to be a movement 'back to basics'. Life is living together. Life need not be a war where man is a wolf to another man.

The moral outrage over what is happening in Ukraine remains strong. Despite the social crisis in the Union due to the energy shortage, hardly anyone is calling for the lifting or easing of sanctions against Russia. Solidarity remains strong. It is yet another miscalculation by the unworldly and conscienceless regime in Moscow.

The governments and peoples of the Union remain ready, together with the USA, to help you in your struggle. We will also be ready to assist you in rebuilding the country after the war. You will be able to call on our solidarity long before you become effective members of the Union. First thing first. That reconstruction should allow the country to leap into a modern economy. Poland and Ukraine had roughly the same national income per capita in 1990. Even before 24 February, Poland was relatively perhaps even five times as prosperous. Poland, meanwhile, has been a member of the Union for almost 20 years. Prosperity came yonder without oligarchs and the corruption they bring. Prosperity goes with competition but also with fairness and freedom. Values are also profitable!

Democracies, by the way, are doing much better than some authors would have you believe. Autocracies are in breathlessness in Russia, in Turkey, in Brazil. China's economic model is facing bigger internal problems than many suspect. The Union is proving that in one year or a little more, it can free itself from dependence on Russian gas. Europe's economies and people are resilient and flexible. They proved that during and after the Covid crisis. They are demonstrating that again now. The number of friends of Russia and China is not large anymore – not even in Asia – except for the ones they bought, but that is never sustainable. So there is no reason to despair. The time of democracy is not over. The time of great empires is not dawning again. The end of ideologies is much closer than the end of values. The West is not decadent. War is decadent. The West is not weak. Peoples who easily submit and obey are weak. We are peace-loving but we are now at a stage of legitimate self-defence and just war. A war is never holy. Only human beings are holy. Religions and believers should realise this. President Lincoln once said that God should not be with us but we should be on God's side.

CIFE, as a European institution from the founding of the European community, has been committed to the process of cooperation and integration since 1954. Personalism is part of its 'raison d'être'. It was among the first institutions offering interdisciplinary academic programmes on European integration. CIFE is based in Nice, Berlin, Brussels and Istanbul. It wants to share with you its conviction and expertise and enrich its own insights through dialogue. It is a two-way street. It is a cooperation. The Memorandum of Understanding foresees a collaboration on joint research programmes and an exchange of academic staff, researchers and students within study programmes.

Future membership of the EU should be academically and intellectually prepared and underpinned. The new generation in Ukraine must be able to learn about what the Union was, what it is and what it wants to become. Most of their lives will take place in that European framework. Ukraine will become one of the largest member states of the Union, geographically and in terms of population. It must be a democratic beacon in their part of the European continent so that the dream of democracy from the Atlantic to the Urals becomes a reality. In 1959, President de Gaulle pronounced these words. He added that 'the fate of the world depended on this'. We must continue to dream. We draw strength from this.

The stakes of the struggle of the people of Ukraine transcend time and space. It extends beyond its historical boundaries, however important. But 'first things first'. Today is about sovereignty and freedom. We are with you for the long haul, for better and for worse. The cooperation between our two institutions is also an illustration of that. We want to work on this together. Hope is a verb.