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Brussels Forum

Prologue: Fragility of the Global System

Unknown Female Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Professor Timothy Garton Ash.

Prof. Timothy Garton Ash: Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I have been given the Shakespearean role of prologue with a rather un-Shakespearean title of The Fragility of the Global System. So let me start in the spirit of Shakespeare by saying that I think the word fragility is a drastic understatement of the challenge we face.

I believe that in the years, shall we say 2014 to 2045, we face circumstances as complex, challenging and potentially dangerous as any we faced in the 20th century. And I think that is so because of two big reasons. First of all, great power shifts and secondly, global challenges.

The very sophisticated projections that you see here from the National Intelligence Council of power

shifts, we can argue about the time scale. We can argue about the position of particular countries. The West has its crisis, others have their crises yet to come. But few, I think, will doubt the trends, the relative shift in power from the west to the rest, in particular, to China and India.

Now, it is simply a statement of historical fact that periods of great power shifts have, historically, been periods of increased tension and usually, of war. We are living in, still living in the longest period of great power peace in modern history. There is no guarantee that will continue. There is no use kidding ourselves and simply saying this time will be different. We have to explain why this time will be different and to talk just loosely about all sorts of interdependence is not good enough, because most of those kinds of interdependence were there in the European-dominated state system before 1914 and still, we went to war.

So actually, what we have to do is, first of all,

to recognize the historical probability of war, in order to avert it. And that is the first challenge we face, the challenge of State craft.

This is complicated by the global challenges that will be familiar to you all. We live in the Anthropocene age, the first age in which the activities of human kind have the potential to, in-fact actually are, changing the physical character of the planet. At the same time, information, ideas, money, people, diseases are whizzing around the planet at a speed never known before. And the combination of those two produces these global challenges. That's the World Economic Forum assessment of the top ten global risks by potential impact, climate change. These will, of course, be familiar to you. Red is a country's most vulnerable.

Global pandemics; the circles show the highest risk areas. Financial system failure. Those most at risk are also in red, but slightly different countries this time. Again, that's the World Economic Forum

assessment. Notice Britain and France in red. Water scarcity, again, red, the most threatened. Notice India. And that brings us to the Brahmaputra River, which has its source in what is culturally and geographically Tibet, culturally and geographically Tibet, politically China, then flows down through India and Bangladesh into the sea. And as many of you know, the Indian government has recently expressed its deep concern about Chinese plans to build hydroelectric dams higher up the river.

So in sum, the essence of the dilemma we face, the core of that fragility is that because of these global challenges, the need, the objective demand for global collective action is greater than it has ever been. But the supply of global collective action is limping far behind and made more difficult to deliver precisely by the great power shifts that we witness geopolitically.

So that, ladies and gentlemen, is a challenge. So what is to be done? What can we in this room--is the lapel mic working or not?

Unknown Male Speaker: Yes.

Prof. Timothy Garton Ash: Yeah. What can we, in this room, what can a broader "we" do about it? I believe that the key lies in two things; legitimate, effective international organizations, institutions networks, and strategic coalitions of willing and able powers to lead on any given issue. Not to go it alone but to lead. If you have one of those two, you're already doing something. But only when you put the two together, the legitimate effective institutions and the strategic coalitions of the willing and able are you really motoring.

And I take it the challenge for us in these two days, as we go through a list of the major issues and regions, is precisely to identify what are the key institutions, what's the key strategic coalitions of the willing and able powers for this particular risk.

Now, GMF, the Brussels Forum, is a classical organizational initiative of the West, of the old West, of a wider West, perhaps of an ever-wider West. So I'm

going to start with the West.

So if we look at the pie chart of population, we see what you all know, namely that the U.S. and Europe and even other countries of the west have a dwindling share of world population. By the way, dark red is the U.S., light red is E.U., light blue is India and dark blue is China on all of these. But if we turn to the three classic dimensions of power, namely hard power, economic power and soft power, and look at just one crude indicator for each, we get a very different picture.

Arms, familiar to many of you. Total military expenditure, the U.S. overwhelming, but the U.S. and Europe together, 58 percent and then you go around, Australia, Canada, Japan and others. Some would argue about the figure in the dark blue triangle for China, but let's leave it for now. Money, GDP and PPP, again, some would dispute the figures but the proportions are clear enough. Still today, the West, and again, if you add to U.S. and Europe, Australia, Canada and then

Japan, which is in there, you're up at 50 percent of GDP.

And soft power. Now, of course, soft power, which everybody talks about endlessly, is very difficult to measure. There's no single indices, but I think this one is pretty good. This is the top hundred universities in the world, and as you can see, at the moment, three-quarters of them are in North America and Europe than in Australia, Canada, Japan and very, very few elsewhere. So put that together and what you see is that the west today still has an extraordinary preponderance in the three classic dimensions of power. Of course, those power shifts--those power proportions will shift, although, by the way, I should mention that it takes quite a few years and quite a bit of freedom to build a great university. But for now, we have that potential and in a sense, as I argued in a book called *Free World* about ten years ago, this is our last historic chance to use that power well to shape international order. In 10 or 20 years-time, we will

not have that plentitude of power.

This is why I think one of the most exciting things we're going to talk about over the next two days is the revival of the transatlantic trade and investment partnership. I think that's an extraordinary, exciting development. The only thing I would say to my fellow Europeans and to our American friends is, please can we find a better acronym? TTIP will be pronounced as "tip." I don't know about American English, but in British English, the tip is not a place you want to be. Why don't we call it TAP, Transatlantic Partnership? That's a little bit better. And the TAP would actually turn on the tap, not just for our economies, but for the world economy as a whole. Particularly, by the way, if we complement it with something which the E.U. has already initiated, and the United States for its part, namely negotiations with Japan on a free trade agreement. And there, you're talking about half the world's GDP, potentially, in a new free trade relationship. So I think that's an extraordinarily

important development. There's clearly much more we can do in the old West.

But what I want to say with emphasis is that the West alone is not enough. It's not only not sufficient, it is not desirable that the strategic coalitions of the willing and able should always be built around one permanent coalition of the West, just as it is undesirable in Europe that action should always be built around a permanent coalition of, say, France and German in the European context, or the U.S. and Europe in the world. Firstly, for reasons of efficacy, how can we address issues of climate change or water scarcity or pandemics or the world economy without China, India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa and others, but also for reasons of legitimacy and acceptance? It is actually much better if we think in terms from issue to issue in every case of a G4, G5, G6, G8 taking the lead, and it's desirable that that strategic coalition of the willing and able should actually be different from case to case. Because that will be better for the

functioning of the international system.

So that, I think, is what we should be looking towards and asking ourselves, where is the G4, 5, 6, 8 or 10 for this particular issue, for this particular region?

Now, thus far, I've talked about powers and you may think, looking at my charts, that I'm thinking only about states. Well, of course, states remain very important but they're not the only powers in the world today. I am working on a book about global free speech. In terms of effective power to determine the terms of global free speech. Google is far more important than Germany, and Facebook is far more important than France, with great respect to both countries. If Facebook were a country with its billion users, it would be the third most populous country on Earth.

There is the map of social networks in December last year. Facebook is blue. This is a map of the most popular social network in each country. There is the empire on which the sun never sets, the empire of

Facebook. What this means is that when we talk about coalitions of willing and able powers, we have to think not just about the public powers but also about the private powers who can be engaged, the Facebooks, the Googles. And by private powers, I mean not just companies but also NGOs and social networks and social movements. Those coalitions I'm talking about will have to involve the private powers, as well.

Let me, last but not least, say a word about Europe. Because we are, after all, in Brussels and the leaders of the E.U. are meeting just up the road, as we speak. I speak to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, as a passionate European. That is not a sentence you will hear often spoken with a British accent these days. But in my case, it's true and there are more of us than you think. And I think it's not hubris to say that Europe has a very particular part to play in the story that I have been telling about addressing the fragility of the global system. It is simply impossible to imagine more effective global collective action unless Europe has a

more coherent voice in the world and is a more cohesive actor in the world. Coming from European summits into other international organizations and networks like here, the G20.

But ladies and gentlemen, that is only half the story. The other half of the story is that in order to do that, Europe has to do, on its regional stage, what we, all of us, have to do on the global stage, namely to build those legitimate and effective institutions with strategic coalitions of the willing and able.

Carl Kraus, the Viennese satirist, said of the Austria/Hungarian empire before 1914, that it was an experimental laboratory for the end of the world. The E.U. today is an experimental laboratory for the future of the world. Because if we in Europe, for all our diversity, having so much shared history and geography and culture and interest, cannot do that thing that we need, what chance is there for us to do it on a global scale? So I think there is a particular role for Europe in this larger story of addressing the fragility of the

global system.

Now, in a moment, in time-honored fashion, Craig Kennedy is going come up here and, with American can-do optimism, blow away all these cobwebs of old European skepticism and doubt. But before that wonderful moment, let me just finish with a very old European joke, which I think is appropriate.

The Prussian general and the Austrian general are in a tight spot on the battlefield. It's a sort of 19th Century version of the crisis of the euro zone. The gunfire is raining down. It's looking very bad. The Prussian general turns to his Austrian colleague and says, "The situation is serious, but not tragic." And the Austrian general says, "No, my friend. The situation is tragic, but not serious."

Thank you very much.