

## Welcome

Let me welcome you all, our guests here in our conference room at IBIS hotel in Budapest as well as all those who are following our conference online. My name is István Hegedűs, I am the chairman of the Hungarian Europe Society. This event is part of a series co-organised with our partners, WiseEuropa from Warsaw, Metropolitan University from Prague and the Institut für Europäische Politik in Berlin.

This time - just like in Gdansk, Prague and Berlin – we are going to focus on the legacy of recent historic changes in our Central European region and, since we are in Budapest, especially, in Hungary. You will all have the opportunity to watch a video produced in our regional collaboration and listen to the retrospective analyses of former significant actors, who were present at decisive moments of the democratic revolutions in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, hence, the collapse of communism, regime-changes, the Wende and the reunification of Germany. Many of the speakers in this short movie also played an important role during the big enlargement of the European Union, or, in our perspective, the accession of our countries and our citizens to the community of democracies in Europe and beyond.

We have included to the miraculous and unforgettable happenings of the years 1989 and 2004 also the memories and legacy of the Hungarian revolution in 1956 which had tremendous global impact on history during the Cold War. We do so – in agreement with our non-Hungarian partners – because we celebrate the anniversary of the uprising of the Hungarian people against the Stalinist-communist regime tomorrow. The outbreak of the anger of the subjects of that totalitarian regime and their desire for a democratic political system unmasked the real nature of the Soviet-typed rule worldwide and gave inspiration for the fight for freedom and liberties in the next decades

in the whole so-called socialist camp. Tomorrow, both the ruling party and the newly united opposition will celebrate the revolution in a highly polarised Hungarian political atmosphere. The government wants to monopolise and manipulate the events 65 years ago in order to legitimise its illiberal, anti-democratic, anti-European, populist political course. The opposition under the leadership of a new joint prime minister candidate has created new hopes following a successful process of primaries that mobilised its supporters when facing parliamentary elections next year. The legacy of 1956, 1989 and 2004 has become a battlefield in this uneven competition for political power. For the opposition, history and the living memories of those wonderful years give a new élan for real change when fighting against a new type of semi-authoritarian regime.

Nevertheless, memories, myths and distorted facts are often used to serve simplistic and fake interpretations of the past and to influence present and future political development. That is why we asked first Gergely Romsics to make a presentation as a historian about the politics of memories helping us in understanding the current - often ideological - conflicts in our public life which have strong historic roots. Following his lecture, I will react to his main points, shortly, then, we will watch the video together - both in this room and online - followed by a round-table discussion with the participation of our distinguished guests from Hungary and Central Europe.

So, let me open now officially our hybrid conference. I would like to ask you, Gergő, to make your presentation.