

No one is so smart as to dream up a detailed plan of social development in a way that it is immutable. True, that kind of planning has been tried repeatedly throughout history, and although always unsuccessfully, it will probably be tried again.

A plan is good, when its sustainability, the correctness of its chosen path is checked every day, when it is open to criticism and to change. This is the way free and democratic societies function, where those elected must ask the voter every day: am I doing the right thing? Am I going in the right direction, are my decisions understandable, do they satisfy you? This principle works just as well for communities smaller than the nation-state as well as for ones that are larger, such as international organizations.

Daily checks of our goals are also healthy for the world-wide finno-ugric community. And even if the questions might be unpleasant and the answers horrible. Without an internal audit it's always even worse. Speaking here today I have to admit I do not have prepared answers for all finno-ugric peoples. I have my own personal answers, my own notions, my own preferences. Our joint answers can come only out of joint efforts, from co-operation.

So what is the big idea in finno-ugric common efforts? Are language and a language tree of people's relatedness drawn long ago in the past enough to be the altar tryptich we bow down to? Is this enough to confirm our faith and provide the cement for remaining true to ourselves everywhere and for everyone? Can they be the inexhaustible source of pride?

Indeed, alongside the finno-ugric people, the indo-european, turkish-tatar, and other linguistic groups hold no language-centered world congresses to speak of. This is a solely Finno-Ugric distinction.

Language, and the preservation and development of languages, are truly important. But this can only occur successfully when we are engaged not in a narrow philological activity or garnishing for avcational ethnography, but a socially encompassing, in other words political, theme.

The three largest finno-ugric peoples have experience with this. After all, in the European Union, the supra-national organization to which Estonia, Finland, and Hungary belong, linguistic diversity, protection of languages and ensuring one's ability to employ them at all official levels have been treated by all member nations as a political matter they have closely followed.

The European Union umbrella has given the Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian languages new guarantees they have never before possessed in their history. In no other continent exist such guarantees or no other international entity takes the health of languages as seriously.

We might thus ask: how can we put all finno-ugric languages under European Union protection to ensure their preservation and development?

In what I have said I have already drawn a line between those finno-ugric peoples who are in the EU and the rest, who aren't. This distinction raises an important question. Do we draw any distinctions among finno-ugric peoples? Belonging to the EU as countries can be used merely

as a formal distinction without implying judgement.

But there are also dangerous emotional, evaluative differences that may not be conducive to cooperation.

Should we and can we even classify our peoples as developed and undeveloped? As bigger and smaller brothers? As native and non-native? As those peoples with a written culture and those without one?

These are vague measures whose use won't really lead anywhere, though it may boost some egos and sink others. They would seem to imply that some are given more rights and duties while others are freed of responsibility.

Consider indigenoussness. Both Estonians and Finns consider themselves quite indigenous to their homes; Estonians have been tilling their fields on the shores of the Baltic for about 5000 years.

Yet we are not indigenous peoples in international parlance. Whenever business suit and cologne-wearing gentlemen in far off palaces and halls of government start talking about the worries of "indigenous peoples", I always get the feeling that this talk is not fully sincere, but a myopic attempt to secure for the evening entertainment festooned in ethnic costume.

And "valuing indigenous cultures" is nothing but political cover to ensure market success for this branch of the entertainment industry. Or perhaps a belated apology and simulated activity to make good upon previous mistakes and maybe even crimes.

At the same time, if a still stateless people declares its indigenoussness to be its sole remarkable characteristic, it thereby conveys a message that, in today's world, calls upon others to bear responsibility for it. Presumably because of some historic injustice, as such a declaration always has a price tag attached.

If, however, we draw no distinctions, and do not create artificial or emotional divides among ourselves, cooperation will come to rest upon a strong foundation, upon common values. Hungarians, Finns and Estonians have chosen so-called European values, which today manifest themselves in the use of liberal democracy to order society.

Ask yourselves: does this choice necessarily presume an independent state? No it doesn't. Back when these societies chose to be European, they had no states of their own and Europe, too, was very different from what it is today.

But freedom and democracy also make for good rules of the game in non-state structures. Freedom and democracy were our choice 150 years ago, when not even the poets dreamt of an Estonian state.

Many finno-ugric peoples have yet to make this choice. As a small aside it bears mentioning, particularly in light of the example of Estonia, that once you have tasted freedom, you will

realize how much of it is sacrificed in the name of surviving or just 'getting by'.

The European Union's critics claim that Estonia, along with Finland and Hungary, have given away part of their sovereignty, their right to make free and independent choices. But, as detailed above, linguistic-cultural guarantees give back to us every day many times what we have given up.

Precisely through the European Union have the finno-ugric languages for the first time in their history developed a truly global reach. Our language rings in the meeting rooms of Brussels and Strasbourg, as I have myself repeatedly witnessed in my previous position as a member of European Parliament.

Here, in Khanty-Mansiysk, which borders Europe's eastern geographic boundary, it may seem a bit odd to speak of Europe, the European Union, and European values. But still – freedom and democracy are universal values that acknowledge neither national nor geographic borders.

Europe's understanding of diversity as a value applies to, and must apply to, everyone. Every individual, people, and culture is part of a global balance, an ecological balance, if you will. If one part, however small, is taken out of the system, lost, or extinguished, nobody can predict what kind of catastrophe this might bring about somewhere else.

It is said that the flapping wings of a butterfly can cause a hurricane. The finno-ugric people may indeed be small butterflies among all of humanity, but it is a concern for all of humanity to ensure that these butterflies not flap their wings in the wrong place the wrong time, in a way that might be fatal to those much larger than the butterflies.

The Czech writer Milan Kundera, writing in French, has an essay with a German title, *Die Weltliteratur*, („Global literature“ in English) in which he writes:

Small peoples differ from large nations not only on quantitative criteria, but also in something deeper. For small peoples existence is not self-evident, an indisputable fact, but a permanent question, a wager, a risk; they are always in a defensive position face to face with History, a force greater than they, which does not take them into account, which does not even notice them.

Kundera goes on to ask what would be the case if the Icelandic Sagas had been written not in Icelandic, a nation of 300 thousand, but in English.

Quote: „The names of the heroes in the Sagas would be as familiar to us as Tristan or don Quijote. Their esthetic particulars, their chronology and their imaginative intermediaries would have provoked all kinds of theories, people would have argued whether or not to consider them the first European novels.“

Most importantly, argues Kundera, they would have influenced living literature through the ages. But they did not, because there are too few Icelanders. But does this mean that they are worth less? That in the pantheon of great creations of the human imagination, that they are of

any lesser stature than the creations of large nations. To the contrary, even the smallest peoples can create the greatest literature.

This is why the ecology of cultures and peoples is an issue for all mankind. This is why the European Union cares.

The utility of global balance is well understood in the European Union. If the finno-ugric question has taken on a powerfully international dimension anywhere, it is there. The finno-ugric question has become an inexorable issue on the agenda of partnership talks between the European Union and Russia. Recently, the European Union appropriated 2.5 million Euros for the support of native peoples in Russia.

The European Union and its members are the motor that has driven the harmonization of protections for minority rights in Europe. And, we might now ask, would finno-ugric concerns be on the European agenda if Hungary, Finland, and Estonia were not members of the Union? Hardly. And herein lies the answer to why European values are also useful east of the Urals.

Much is happening on the field of Finno-ugria, of which account has been given and will be given during this Congress.

This is an opportunity primarily for governments, but also for civic organizations and every citizen.

I do not wish to deprive anyone of the joy of telling us what praiseworthy work he has done and intends to do henceforth. Nevertheless, let me emphasize that the more multifaceted the underlying basis of our cooperation, the more securely it rests on common basic values, the more assuredly the finno-ugric wagon will roll in the right direction.

As a start, freedom and democracy, and by extension Europe, are not at all bad basic values. And, to be honest, there's really no alternative.