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The triad formed by freedom, democracy and economic growth is the best proof that the old ideologies that sought to force us to choose between freedom and prosperity, which played with democracy at its own whim are simply false. There is no opposition between freedom and prosperity. There is no opposition between social justice and legal certainty.

During these days we had the chance to profoundly reflect and debate about democracy and its institutions; about Latin America and Europe; about the opportunities and challenges that we have to face in the coming years, and how we can do it so that our societies are increasingly more prosperous and fairer. In all of these areas we have invariably ended on the word and idea of freedom.

Freedom is what gives sense and measure to democracy; is what institutions must preserve and promote; it is the most important link that we must enforce between Europe and Latin America. They offer us from their hands the best opportunities and also the most serious challenges. It is the key to prosperity. Freedom is the word that unites us. It is the agora of these days, because it is the agora of political thoughts that matter and we need.

A year ago, April 10 of 2012, the foundation which I chair – Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies– presented in the city of Cadiz the actualization of its strategic report on Latin America. We proposed “An agenda for freedom” at the city that brought in 1812 the political freedom to which at that time were called “spaniards from both hemispheres”. Spaniards and Latin Americans, free men of both hemispheres, worked together to write the Spanish Constitution of 1812. Spanish and Latin Americans have worked now to create a document devoted to the defense of freedom.

The foundation of that work is simple: we want for Latin America the same as we want for Spain and for Europe; the same level of democratic quality, the same respect for human rights, the same ambition of economic progress and social cohesion, the same welfare and the same future.

This is the only way to make true progress and to ensure that the relation between both sides of the Atlantic improves from the dialogue among equals. Because we are equal.

A year ago I stated that the breadth, depth and density of the relation of Spain and Latin America is an indicator of our own political health as a country and of the clarity of the vision that we have on our position in the world. Because we Spaniards have an interest on Latin America and we want the best for Latin America, when we become aware of who we are and what we ought to be.

And not only because the historical unbreakable link between us. Also as an example of those things that we must learn to do better.

In recent years, Latin America has given us many good news and not few lessons. It's a not a future investment, nor a mere possibility to be shaped in the future.. Nowadays Latin America conforms to the paradigm of democracy, freedom and economic growth, although this paradigm contrasts with some exceptions.

And that triad formed by freedom, democracy and economic growth is the best proof that the old ideologies that sought to force us to choose between freedom and prosperity, which played with democracy at its own whim are simply false. There is no opposition between freedom and prosperity. There is no opposition between social justice and legal certainty. There is no opposition between welfare development and the rule of law.

The reality is just the opposite. It's institutional normality, the respect for rules and the defense of democracy what makes economic growth, the expansion of the middle classes, the development of the welfare state and the observance of everybody's rights possible. Is Cuba better off by being less free? Or is it better and safer to live in Pyongyang rather than in Seoul? Did we discover an oasis lying behind the Berlin Wall?

Latin America has indeed learned from that history. Representative democracy and market economy have largely settled there in recent years. The peaceful transfer of power between different political parties has laid the foundations for good business practices and policy continuity. It is no longer necessary to start from scratch every four years. Poverty has been reduced, albeit social inequalities remain severe. We are witnessing the consolidation of a broad middle class that generates economic growth, institutional stability and political moderation.

Gradually, more and more people believe that progress is being made and that they are part of that progress.

People who feel that good ideas will yield good results and that these results really transform their lives. Good ideas connected to the effective separation of powers, freedom of the press, education, entrepreneurship, rule of law, small government, and private property.

There is widespread and sustained economic growth in Latin America, there have been orderly transitions that have consolidated good policies, there is a new international role for Latin America. There are many success stories to tell and boast about.

And those who cannot tell them are precisely those who have chosen the old ways and the old policies.

When genuine, democracy is the will to exercise and protect freedom, freedom of oneself and the freedom of others; the institutions that make it possible, a civic culture which arises from an essential idea: the peaceful coexistence of free people is more worthy than the fulfillment of a partisan ideal. Or, rather, the peaceful coexistence of free people is the true political ideal.

Populism, which is the current biggest threat to freedom, transforms democracy into something else. Something with a similar outward appearance, but with a completely different content. Democracy becomes an empty shell. Populism seeks to look like a democracy, not to be a democracy.

The appearance of democratic elections remains, but it is forgotten that rules must be observed, pluralism must be defended the media must not be threatened, the judiciary must be independent, etc. If all this is missing, democracy goes astray. And freedom goes astray with it.

Populism is based on something that looks like it but it is not leadership. Because the true leader does not manipulate society to impose upon it his own interest. It is exactly the opposite, the true leader serves the interests of society, he shows what its interests are, and works for the people. Even at his own expense

Therefore, the historical outcome of true leadership is positive for the country, whereas and the historical outcome of populism is negative for the country, although sometimes is -or it may seem- good for the populist.

The populist usually understands politics as patronage. And because he harasses and silences the media, the criticism is not visible. So he will likely ruin the country, but a large group of supporters will mourn his loss.

Leadership strengthens the middle class, whereas populism undermines it. . And in doing so it jeopardises democracy and the welfare state. It poses a threat to freedom.

To provide leadership, respect democracy and take criticism, while not getting carried away by populism, is a most difficult task and usually extremely cumbersome. That's why leadership is so rare. And that's why we must welcome the fact we have been able to find recently in Latin America true leaders who have changed the history of their countries, who have said no to resignation, and who have overcome the weight of history.

I must say that sometimes we receive good news because a certain left has decided to copy our ideas and proposals. One left which we must welcome and whose experience can be valuable to us.

To lose the fear of saying what we think and doing what we believe. To not be ashamed to be right on something and to be able to spread it. To not let ourselves be overtaken by the copy when we are the original, and to provide more and better progress to our societies than our imitators could never provide, and in doing so recognize that we are right

We must overcome the ridiculous trends that encourage us to hide, to disguise, and to use a totally useless mumbo jumbo. We must restore our intellectual strength and our moral clarity so we can openly present ourselves as what we are: defenders of freedom, democracy and of the true progress of societies. We must respect ourselves at least as much those who copy us respect us.

Among other things because there is no guarantee that the left will not go back the way it used to. Just as we have had the fortune of seeing leadership arise in many places, we still could see populism prevail in those same places. The best we can do to prevent the latter from happening is not leave to others what should be our duty, and not take for granted that those who today follow the good example will not tomorrow follow the bad example.

In Spain we know what that means. The Spanish people are working hard to overcome the economic, political and social consequences of a leftist government. And we will overcome them. Spain is here to stay.

We must defend freedom. But not just the idea or theory, but its reality. The reality of freedom produces the reality of progress. Today, the region best rehabilitating the market economy, moderation and institutions is Latin America. It's Latin America the region where true freedom is becoming a reality. Unlike Europe, a continent where everything seems to be put into question and that seems to move towards old populism, both known and disturbing. Europe needs to follow the Latin American example. It needs this experience of freedom, democracy and progress to be told and understood.

In that historic and consolidating social change, that we must make irreversible, the role of Spanish companies is very important and I must say I am very proud of it. The modernizations of the economy, infrastructure and telecommunications -which are key in social development-have a decisive Spanish participation.

It is a process similar to the one Spain went through several decades ago. We were then proud to offer the example of our political transition, our economic openness, our social modernization. Today we are proud to follow the example of Latin America and of its political transitions, economic openness and social modernization.

My experience tells me that when a country believes in freedom and takes it seriously, its potential for growth increases, the welfare state is strengthened and the middle classes are extended and consolidated; the rule of law also becomes stronger. The country's international influence and prestige grow, and it, becomes a factor of stability and security in the world. It contributes to the development of civilization.

A free society is a more dynamic and entrepreneurial, better prepared for the twenty-first century. To disparage freedom means placing yourself outside the story that globalization brings with it.

Freedom does not fracture or degrade societies, it's the other way round. It strengthens and dignifies them from its very base. The freedom of all is the equality of all; it's a society of opportunities for all.

More freedom means more culture, more education, and more ethical requirement at all levels. A free society is a better society. A fairer country, with more social mobility, a country for each and everyone. A country capable of following and setting the pace of history.

Freedom is useful. In order to defend it there is no need to put ourselves in the level of the ideal, we must remain in the practical level, of practical politics par excellence.

Europe -Spain- and Latin America must help each other to keep pace with the history we are living through. The history of the spread of freedom. I am sure that meetings like this will help us succeed in this shared goal.

A Few months ago I was pleased to present Mario Vargas Llosa the fourth FAES Freedom Award in Madrid. I said back then that "Mario Vargas Llosa's soul remains in constant vigil for freedom, watching for any sign of fatigue, laziness or decay in it. Always alert against totalitarianism and its ways. He lives, narrates and imagines the daily deed of being free, thus touching the summit of civilization".

Mario's soul is the soul of that Latin America which is truly free. Let's remain in constant vigil for any signs of fatigue in the defense of our freedom. Let's achieve the daily deed of being free and thus touch the summit of civilization".