

‘Good evening to the Graduates of 2020 and their parents and to the teachers and Governors of the EC’

It is a great honour for me to be invited to speak to you. Firstly, because your school has a very good reputation, and secondly, because of my age. We, the old people, experience a strong temptation to teach the young and give them our insights and advice. At the same time, we do not realize that some of our advice may be directly toxic to young people. Despite this risk, I was invited to tell you what I consider most important for you. I have three things. Not that I do not have more of them, but the time allotted to me allows me to mention only these.

First lesson. Today, we see boys and girls all around us using their mobiles. But how many of them have asked themselves: how come these gadgets exist? Are they aware of the amount of work people had to undertake in the past so that today there is the know-how needed to produce these things? And how many people contributed to these efforts? The answer is clear - endless millions. Indeed, millions had to perform a boring and repetitive work first at school and then in factories and laboratories. This is my first message - our lives today, our living standards today – we owe them to the generations past - to their patience to endure the tedious boredom of learning and work. We stand on their shoulders. And so, if humanity is to have a future, there must always be sufficient number of people willing to endure the tedious boredom of learning and work. Always remember that!

I have chosen mobiles as a distinctive example of the human achievement that is universally distributed among young people, who, at the same time, rarely ask where the wonderful thing came from. I could easily choose any other artifact of the modern world that we take for granted in the same way we take for granted that the sun will rise tomorrow.

Second lesson: There is a lot of talk today about freedom and human rights. In this context, we tend to talk about *individual* freedom and *individual* rights. Rarely - if ever - is it recalled that many of these terms are meaningful if and only if one is not alone. After all, what would the freedom of expression mean for a lonely man on an island? Yes - if we interpret freedom primitively as the absence of constraints, then freedom of expression for a person alone on an island is absolute. Greater than in any society in the world. However, there is no one to talk to. And truly little to talk about by the way. The same is true of freedom of assembly. Free elections - sure! From dawn to dusk you are free to vote every day. But who to vote for and to what body?

And what about the rights? Consider the right to work. Of course, you can work on that island from dawn to dusk - none can fire you and make you unemployed. But you will work for free. Right to education – but who should provide it to you? Right to health care - but who should take care of you? All these rights are nonsense unless there are some other persons and they assume an obligation to work for you, to deliver. Without society there are no rights. You can only have them in an organized

society, but the more rights you require, the more duties will be imposed on you in turn. So, think twice before demanding some new right!

Third advice is one that could be toxic to you. I hesitated to come up with it, but then I thought I could risk it, given your expected level of education and maturity.

It is not true that *vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*, which translates as *everything is utterly meaningless*. So says the Ecclesiastes, - one of the books of the Bible. I declare that nothing is meaningless, but it is true that everything from the moment of its creation is attacked by decay and needs constant maintenance care, which often does not prevent decay and destruction in the end. In other words, I am telling you: do not be discouraged from creative work - from establishing relationships, from working on a variety of projects of any kind - simply by failing to complete some of them or by a fact that even those brought to successful finish will begin to decline after some time and - despite your best efforts – are going to crumble in the end. The moment you experience disappointment, you must brace yourself for the temptation to accept the conclusion that everything is futile, everything is futility. Mobilize your soul and confront this temptation head on.

I speak from experience of many people who opposed the communist regime when such opposition seemed utterly meaningless, indeed. For decades on it seemed so. And where we are now!

Finally, I would like to share with you what I consider to be a defining feature of us human persons, what makes us unique and thus what we as people should do and what we should enable others to do: Freely ask questions, seek answers, offer answers and seek the right ones. I mean answers for essential questions - what is true, what is reasonable, what is good, fair, beautiful. And, of course, what is funny! Societies, states - whole civilizations should be judged by the extent to which they enabled people to do so without fear.

And why they should be so judged? Find the answer yourself!