

“Liberals must embrace power politics to define the 21st century.” - says LI President Van Baalen

After the fall of the Berlin wall, the American philosopher Francis Fukuyama concluded that the only remaining viable ideology was Western liberalism. In “The End of History and the Last Man”, Fukuyama predicted an end to history, continued economic improvement and global prosperity. Poverty, oppression, environmental pollution and religious strife would be problems of the past. We would be living in a constant present. Besides the question whether a constant present would be desirable, the past decade has proved Fukuyama wrong. Although the danger of a massive global conflict has decreased with the fall of the Iron Curtain, threats to international security have increased significantly. Liberalism has lost its defining characteristic of engagement, and is now on the defensive. Liberalism, with its emphasis on civil liberties and the free market should be, by all rights, the defining ideology of the 21st century.

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union as the two global superpowers coexisted in a state of carefully constructed equilibrium. Conflicts were fought by proxy on the fringes of the two power blocs: in Cuba, Chile, Korea, Vietnam, Africa and Afghanistan. These two superpowers prevented the Cold War from turning from a conflict of détente to a full scale military clash. There were policies of containment from both sides. With the implosion of the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union, only the United States remained powerful enough to prevent global conflicts, fight organized crime and combat international terrorism. In "The Rise and the Fall of

the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000" Paul Kennedy wrote, just before the Berlin wall came down (1987), how previous world powers had faced the same problem of being overstretched. This was one of the torments of the Soviet Union in its final phase, and now looms large as a serious problem for the United States. The United States has taken on the role of international police officer after the Cold War, and has overextended its resources rendering the country less effective. The Europeans have left efforts of stabilizing the world (Iraq, Afghanistan and the international struggle to fight terrorism) to the United States itself. The European Union restricts itself to using soft power policies, like international development and peace management; mostly in places where peace has already been achieved. The EU does not use hard power, nor is it strongly committed to peace enforcing and peace keeping. This means that the united West is not able to fulfill an exemplary role to the rest of the world.

The rivals of the West do not advocate the adherence to universal rights such as human and civil rights, freedom and democracy, good governance and rule of law. Russia and China are at best authoritarian regimes, who deny their citizens basic and fundamental human rights and engage in outdated 19th century power politics to reach their goals. China has enshrined the control of strategic resources for its industries to as a central tenet of its foreign policy. For China, dealing with dictatorships and weak states is easy. Africa is essentially being colonized a second time. Russia uses its enormous potential of energy resources as a political weapon. The increasingly important economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China, the so called BRIC-countries, are either authoritarian like China and Russia, or fail to reach a more equal distribution of wealth, leading to the

inability of great segments of their society to take part in the economy and the governing of their countries.

Economically speaking, liberalism seemed the sole remaining dominant force after the Cold War. Privatization and liberalization thrived throughout the world, but the notion that the open market economy needs rules and mechanisms of control was not fully realized. Reaganomics and Thatcherism have broken the backbone of unions and bureaucracy, but have at the same time weakened the basics of the economy. The current financial and economic crisis has not been caused by liberal free market policies, but by failing legislation and a lack of control. A strong economy is a structured economy that offers opportunities for many instead of riches for few. The structuring of markets has to emphasize individual responsibility by having room for private initiatives and calculated risk taking: both serve the general interest, and not short term self interest. The political elite carry a great responsibility for the functioning of the government and markets. Noblesse oblige: this is what the barons of the port of Rotterdam knew when they rebuilt their city of the devastation of the Second World War. Not to make short term profits, but for long term stability. The encouragement of scientific education and the construction of public works in Rotterdam were made possible with the help of private initiatives. Exactly these notions of serving the public interest and of social responsibility were lacking on Wall Street, in the City of London and the Damrak of Amsterdam in the nineties.

The power of liberalism is the combination of civil rights, social responsibility and the free market. In short: freedom in its broadest sense. The liberalism that created the social laws of the nineteenth century, realized universal suffrage and that emphasizes

private initiative offers solutions for international stability and economic prosperity. The West, consisting of the United States, Canada, the European Union, New Zealand, Australia and Japan, should not sit quietly while human rights are being trampled and countries become increasingly protectionist. It needs to conclude new alliances with developing countries that are moving towards democracy in Latin America, Africa and Asia. African countries like Zimbabwe, Senegal, South Africa and Morocco are at crossroads between democracy and autocracy. In Latin America Chavism is on the rise, but there are still numerous civil society actors and political parties who resist that tendency. The Arab world is fixated on Israel and uses the country as an excuse to oppress their own populations and deny their people freedom and prosperity. The Arabs have a lot to offer to the world if they decide to enter the 21st century with an unconditional embracing of freedom, instead of continuing to play the role of global victim. It is not a coincidence that in all before mentioned countries and regions liberal political parties play an important role. Liberal politicians in the free West have to support their colleagues in these regions. The construction of democratic constitutional states has to be our biggest export product once again. Only democracy and free trade can bring stability and prosperity. A lot will depend on the German FDP that finds itself presently in the center of European power, and of the American Democratic Party, that has to start using power politics. The eloquent words of President Obama cannot be the only tool of the United States in an increasingly chaotic world.

Liberalism is unique in its combination of civil and economic freedoms. The Liberal International has to be at the forefront of freedom and must strive for the separation of

church and state, freedom of expression and freedom of the press, education and quality health care and free access to the market for all. Liberals should not want to be admired by their opponents, but should want to be seen as integral political actors. Politics is not a game of tennis. Liberals have to take the initiative again when it comes to financial and economic recovery on the basis of the free market. Liberals have to be prepared to defend their values with strong defense policies, a strong constitutional state, an emphasis on education, fair health care and an efficient state, that dares to make choices. The defense of the separation between church and the state creates an environment which can fight against extremism and intolerance without the oppression of religious groups as a whole. The law is equal to all and all are equal to the law. Discrimination is unacceptable to liberals. Emancipation of minorities and their rise to free citizenship is our right of existence. Liberalism has a long journey ahead to establish itself as a valid and enduring ideology on a global level. Liberalism has to seize the public arena again. When Frits Bolkestein was elected President of Liberal International in Noordwijk 1996, he stressed his ambition that liberals would regard politics as a game of rugby, and would be prepared to fight. Political correctness should not be a liberal issue. As President of Liberal International I want to continue with this ambition of Frits Bolkestein.