

## **Speech at the Budapest Demographic Forum**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for the invitation and for having wisely organised this first international forum connecting the family issue with the dramatic demographic winter we are experiencing all around the world, especially in Europe.

I would like to thank the Hungarian government, in particular Minister Katalin Novak for her precious work and her convinced as well as effective commitment for these topics.

Since I don't have so much time, I will highlight some recent statistical data collected by international bodies and elaborate several challenges and comments.

I suggest to change our usual perspective to look at these opportunities, which turned into problems.

First of all, I would like to talk about the desire of our youths to get married and have children. Last year, the OECD sent us very interesting data on European youths' ideal number of children. The average number of desired children for men and women in the OECD countries is over 2,5, more than the effective number of children born in these nations. Only in 5 out of 28 European countries people over 15 want to have less than 2 kids. These data should encourage us to develop family policies; according to statistics, in 6 out of 28 EU countries young people want to have more than 3 children.

These data lead to an important question: is politics at the service of citizens or is taking advantage of them? Family policies represent service: they are aimed to satisfy citizens' desires, who want to be happy not only within their families, but within families including and welcoming children. So every family policy is useful and fair for the future of the nations, and

represents a real service to people. This is the reason why family policies are an investment and not a cost for the State, an investment that should be shared by all political forces and not only by temporary parliamentary majorities. Although the desire of stability and children remains high in the OECD countries, we should remember this trend is frustrated, because of States' inattention. As a consequence, many young people decide to leave their parents' houses later (Eurostat, November 2015). Among the family policies of a secular State, politicians need to pay particular attention not only to the birthrate, but also to young families' start-up. Young people should be supported by national and local policies when searching for a new habitation, when buying the furniture for their first house and during the first years of their new life with partners. I am not asking for privileges for families. On the other hand, I think and I keep on repeating that these are simple investments in the medium term. They are very fruitful for any nation to build a rich future.

The 2014 World Family Map gives us another interesting data set. This renowned study shows how family stability is a positive factor not only for the community and the national social cohesion in which the family lives, but also for children within the family itself. Earlier we listened to the testimony of the English government's representative, who strongly underlined the social costs of family breakdown. These high costs should be sustained by English government and welfare. Divorces and separations have high costs on society, economy and children, which must be paid by the State to control this damage. This figure is more explicative than most speeches. The public role of marriage and family produces positive effects (stability) as well as negative ones (break). For this reason, investing on family stability is not only an effective way to prevent psychological and learning deficit among future citizens, but also to prevent social and economic costs.

Investing in family stability is good also for State's wealth and costs. Many studies show these conclusions, including the 2014 World Family Map. Considering the State's duty to invest in family stability, I would like to remind you that the current great number of divorces should encourage the State to invest on "courses" to inform people on marriage and parents' private/public rights and duties. The high number of divorces and cohabitations between

adults represents another problem: the need to find new appealing public reasons to explain the goodness, the appeal and the value of marriage and family.

In addition to that, there is the huge dilemma emerging from these data: the issue of fiscal and social justice. How can we think about a just fiscal system, when the general welfare has to face the huge number of family breakdowns and their relative costs? How could be possible that a stable family biting the bullet during difficult times has to pay for the social costs of those who prefer to divorce at the first obstacle?

Speaking of social justice, we can not ignore the issue of elderlies and pensions. The 2015 World Report on Ageing and Health elaborated by the WHO underlines the increase of world's life expectancy and affirms: "For many reasons, it is extremely difficult to predict the impact that population ageing will have on health care expenditures". How can we think about a welfare society system of solidarity networks able to foster the collaboration between generations, starting from family? If elderly care policies developed from family policies, they would not only strengthen the relationships between generations and the transmission of knowledge from one to another, but also develop care relationships and reduce costs. This way, old people could have a longer happy life, while families could strengthen their inner relationships founded on gratuity. In addition to that, the State could save resources.

However, it is necessary to elaborate a just public fiscal system. Why should families (especially large families) pay senseless unjust taxes to sustain single people's pensions? In other words, why should my daughters and future grandchildren pay for singles' pensions?

I would like to conclude this short speech with a slogan: What is good for family is good for the State and the entire society. I am not saying this just because I'm Christian. I am saying this, because reality invites us to take this beautiful and useful direction.