



**Speech by Juan Pina, President of the Individual Freedom Party (Spain)**

**European Liberal Forum. Sintra, Portugal, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

Mr. Chairman, dear liberal friends,

1. First of all, may I thank the European Liberal Forum for their kind invitation to take part in this conference, and our Portuguese liberal colleagues, especially Miguel Duarte, for their enthusiastic hospitality and their hard work to organize this event.
2. The subject I've been asked to speak about is Europe and the nation-states. This is, of course, a matter that would require a whole conference for itself. I shall try to summarize my ideas and especially the views of the Individual Freedom Party.
3. We all come from a very high degree of Europeism. I think there's not one European liberal who was not a Europhile at the beginning of his or her political involvement, especially on this Iberian Peninsula or ours. But I also believe that very few liberals are so enthusiastic about the European Union any longer, at least in its current shape.
4. Twenty years ago, when I was a young political activist striving to make my "centrist" party in Spain a liberal one, Europe meant a lot. It meant first of all modernity. It meant a lot of personal, individual sovereignty, compared to a Spanish society which had been forced to accept old fashioned traditionalism for far too long. Europe also meant progress. We knew that our richer neighbours to the North of the Pyrenees would build our motorways and subsidize our industry, although nobody would put it this way. And Europe was also a way to get rid of the permanent tensions between the Spanish national feelings and the other national feelings existing in several parts of our territory, because the continental federal puzzle would overcome those tensions by providing a new frame where everyone would be comfortable. On this particular point we were rather naive.

5. Twenty years later, the European Union's political project is subject to a very high risk of non completion if it fails to understand the world around us, as well as the terminal state of its economic and social paradigm. For liberals, more Europe was an excellent idea because it meant more freedom, especially free circulation of goods, services, data, capital, and people. And by the way, it is sad and worrying to see now some steps backwards about free circulation of people, and it is frightening to learn about the proposals for a European cyberspace firewall and deep data package inspection.
6. Yes, liberals were the closest friends of the European ideal, but we never endorsed a gigantic new state which is not and will never be under the real control of the European citizens. Liberals never approved an incredibly intricate and costly bureaucracy running our lives and being permanently used by our national governments as an excuse to impose decisions on us. Liberals wanted more Europe because we are universalists, and Europe was just the first step towards a more free world with less government, less borders and more free trade. The national state based on cultural identity and language was already an outdated burden back then, and Europe was quite a reasonable way to get rid of it. But not in order to substitute it with something even worse, something which is controlled, in the end, by the very national governments we wanted to diminish.
7. Pan-Europeanism is nowadays confronted with a serious alternative. Either it finalizes its project at long last, quickly, or it will be simply overcome by the much faster process of globalization, and not just economic. But the national governments, both the existing ones and the ones aspiring to be born, are not really prepared to lose power. Power to use taxpayer money, power to use our money against us, is an addictive drug, and collectivistic politicians will do anything for their dose.
8. As many of you know, the Individual Freedom Party is very much interested in the renewal of liberalism. International meetings of liberal parties often discuss the space and the future of liberal ideas and parties. Some people argue that we should be more to the left or more to the right, some other believe in a strategic centrism that forces us to move in parallel with our two big neighbours, the socialists and conservatives, to keep that central place which only exists in our imagination, because the two large parties have occupied it simultaneously, long ago.
9. The Individual Freedom Party believes in a liberalism which is not in the middle between socialists and conservatives, but away from them and ahead of them. In Hayek's words, "I call my ideas liberal and they are simultaneously the opposite to both socialist and conservative ideas". I very much agree with this sentence, which lets us see our ideological enemies for what they really are: the same. They are the same. They are collectivists which want more state, more regulations, obligations and prohibitions, more of our hard-earned money and less freedom for everyone. Which values they will impose with that power, with our money, may be slightly different, but it will always mean a strong interference in our freedom. I don't care if the state pushes traditionalist moral values or Marxist egalitarian values: I simply don't want the state to impose *any* values. Civil society will adopt and abandon many values, often opposed to each other but co-existing in society, as part of a cultural process based on the spontaneous order emerging from free human action. The state is not welcome to interfere in this process, in any way, because such interference will always diminish individual sovereignty.
10. I like to use this expression, individual sovereignty, and ten years ago I published an essay called the Manifesto for Individual Self-Determination. When we consider the very concept

of a “nation”, already in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I wish to stress that this concept is quite alien to liberalism. The national myths, in their current shape, are a product of 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism. We all know the disastrous results of nationalism when it has been let loose, particularly in the first half of last century. National feelings, like religious feelings, should be something private, and should not really play a role in government.

11. Probably the most harmful type of nationalism is state nationalism, for it already has the power and the tools to make government bigger and more invasive and costly. But in fact, every nationalism aspires to have its own government and to make it as powerful as possible. It is part of its collectivistic nature. The only difference between aspirant nationalism and state nationalism is the fact that the latter is less evident, as its cultural engineering meets very little opposition. But every type of nationalism is a dangerous idea which creates ground for more state. Nationalism is in fact very “statogenic” and it is therefore hardly compatible with the ideas of individual freedom, the ideas represented by classic liberalism and its best offsprings: the trends allowing it to renew and advance ahead of its conservative and socialist enemies, for instance Italian radicalism or North American libertarianism.
12. Because the “national issue” is so hot in Spain, I am often confronted with the question, who should have more power and budget, the autonomous communities or the central government? And the same discussion can also be extended to Europe. My answer as a liberal is always the same: I don’t care, I will tactically support that option which means less taxes and less state interference both in the economy and in the private lives of the citizens. If a part of current Spain would declare independence tomorrow, only to make a fully liberal-libertarian country with 5 % taxation, fully private services, very few laws, no social engineering of any kind, true money based on real reserve, no war on drugs, no foreign war involvement, no subsidies to culture or agriculture, etcetera, how couldn’t I welcome that and even move there? If the same kind of state would be the proposal of a renewed European Unionism, how couldn’t I be the staunchest supporter of such an Europe? If those who want to recentralize Spain would propose it under these terms, how couldn’t I support them? What matters is the kind of society we want, and how to govern it, not the territory or the obsolescent national myth. But of course, unfortunately neither centralist nationalists nor peripheral nationalists, nor strong European Unionists propose such a state. On the contrary, they all compete for more state intervention in all aspects of the economy and our lives.
13. I do not care if the airport in Barcelona is supervised by the Catalan Government, the Spanish one, the local administration of El Prat de Llobregat, or Brussels: what I want is to see it returned to civil society through a fair and transparent privatization and a full liberalization of that market. And the same applies to all public enterprises, starting with government run TV and radio, and finishing with all essential services, like education, pensions or healthcare, which need to be universalized with state vouchers but let in the hands of those who know the business.
14. European liberals should be the first to acknowledge the fact that social democracy is over. British-German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf used to say that we live under the social-democrat consensus, which started together with the rebuilding of our continent after World War II. This consensus was assumed by everyone: conservatives, socialists and, sadly, even liberal parties. This social-democrat paradigm silently accepted by all, started together with the European Union and it meant a third way between the two blocks of the

Cold War. It is no longer necessary. Or possible. The world around us has changed. Globalization is much faster than European construction. The so called Welfare State has failed. It has been revealed that it was not sustainable, for it was merely based on government seizure of wealth, and (even more than that), it was based on debt, a debt that will need to be paid by the coming generations. A debt that is starting to be paid, sadly, by the young Greeks, the young Irish and the young Portuguese. A debt that will certainly be paid by the younger Spaniards, the same ones who are so angry to camp in the squares but who address their anger to the wrong targets: the *free market* which was never free, the *capitalist economy* which was in fact fully intervened and controlled by the Orwellian, Leviathan-state, and the *money* which was not real or stable because its value was manipulated by central bank politicians.

15. We European liberals must face the challenge. Either we continue to compete with the conservatives and social-democrats for the same electoral niche and the same political space (and in that case I am sure we are doomed, because they also occupy that space, both of them, and they are more powerful); or we become somehow anti-system within the system, in order to change the system. In order to get rid of the Hyper-State created by six decades of rampant social-democracy. In order to return the main services to civil society. In order to avoid any kind of social and cultural engineering from the government, whatever the party in office. In order to drastically diminish the economic burden of the state on our shoulders and especially on the shoulders of our children. In order to substitute the social-democratic consensus with a liberal consensus, and in order to stop discussing national, subnational and supranational sovereignty to start discussing what really matters, individual sovereignty, that is, how to recover your freedom.

Thank-you