

Introduction Francis Fukuyama

The world is going through a phase in which hard power seems to be the decisive factor. The outcome of the war in Ukraine for a large part depends on the amount of weapons and money the Ukrainian government is given to resist the Russian invasion. Europe's political future, inevitably bound up in this conflict, seems for the moment to be determined by material issues such as energy infrastructure and gas prices.

But what about the soft power that forms the backdrop of this time of conflict? Ideas and principles are at stake just as much as lives, incomes and territory are. Last March, our speaker of today, Professor Francis Fukuyama, published a much-discussed essay in the *Financial Times* in which he spoke of 'Putin's attack on the liberal order'. The Ukrainians, conversely, have stood up not only as defenders of their own country, but as defenders of liberalism as well. This was, according to Mr. Fukuyama, another reminder that the existing liberal world cannot be taken for granted. It is, as he wrote, 'something for which we must constantly struggle, and which will disappear the moment we lower our guard.'

This is precisely the reason why it is so important to keep track of Mr. Fukuyama's thoughts and writings, and why it is such a great honor to host him here, in Amsterdam, at the John Adams Institute. As one of the world's leading thinkers on how liberal democracy can sustain itself and how it can collapse, his work is instructive to all democratic citizens on how they can take up the task of defending the political system that grants them their liberty and prosperity.

Mr Fukuyama's new book, *Liberalism and its discontents*, which we will discuss here today and can be bought and signed after the event, is a clear warning call against liberal complacency. Like no other, Mr Fukuyama identifies the threats to liberalism, not just those posed by autocratic leaders - and autocrats who aspire to be leaders - but also by our own political culture that increasingly tries to lock up the individual into fixed group identities. To push back against these currents, Mr Fukuyama offers a much-needed reminder of the virtues of liberalism and why this political philosophy is worth fighting for.

Apart from listening carefully today, I recommend you follow American Purpose, a media platform and intellectual community dedicated to the 'fight to protect liberal democracy'. Mr Fukuyama is the founder of American Purpose and his contributions are titled 'Frankly Fukuyama'. By speaking frankly, Mr Fukuyama explains for instance how America can move away from crippling polarization - a lesson European democracies better learn also. He also explains why, according to him, Ukraine will eventually win and why the administrative state, much maligned these days also here in The Netherlands, is something to be cherished. I point out these examples because they perfectly capture great relevance of Mr Fukuyama's work: he offers a path forward in a time where many democracies seem to be stuck.

Now, all of you will know the phrase 'the end of history' that Mr Fukuyama so famously coined in the late eighties, just when Russia's previous incarnation started to collapse. But I dare to state that very few have fully understood the complete body of thought behind what has become a much used turn of phrase. For this let me remind you of the warning Mr Fukuyama gave in his famous book *The end of history and the last man* all these years ago. Yes, liberal democracy might seem to reign supreme at any point in time, but there is always the danger of - and here I quote - 'dissatisfied individuals that are ready to drag the world back into history with all its wars, injustice and revolution'.

Well, we certainly have been dragged back into history with its wars, injustices, and revolution, not just by a new generation of autocratic strongmen, but perhaps also by the complacency for which Mr Fukuyama warned. This raises the question how peace, justice and stability, the set of political goals which liberal democracy serves, can be again strengthened. No better time, in short, to hear from Francis Fukuyama.