The Hungarian public has gotten to know two types of Americans visiting us. One of them wonders that we live a human life, we have highways where cars rumble, several-storey buildings, shops and comfortable hotels, people are usually well-dressed and my fellow countrywomen are strikingly pretty. The other is very knowledgeable, knows every little fact of our life, our virtues and weaknesses, everything except perhaps our past and therefore our soul. A Hungarian is telling you this, but you would probably hear roughly the same if a Czech or a Pole were standing here in front of you.

In my part part of the world called East Central Europe we have many different ethnic groups carrying a diverse genetic and cultural heritage, intermingled with each other in many small countries. But, in spite of this great diversity, our common features, our historic and social determinism seem to weigh more, especially when viewed from a distance, and seem to outline a common future, too. When I speak about the future of Hungary, I should really speak about the future of the whole region because of our common past, distant and recent, and our common present, too.

One of our greatest poets called Hungary a "ferryboat country ... inching to and fro between the two shores even in the most visionary of its dreams. From East to West and then, more readily, all the way back." If I were to push this metaphor I would say a whole piece of the European cake remained to be a region in between Western and Eastern Europe. This region, "Europe-in-between" was drawn by its aspirations to the Western shore for at least a thousand years and pushed back again and again by the turbulences of history to the Eastern shore.

The nucleus of this East Central European region consists of what is today the Czech and Slovak Republic, Poland and Hungary, three states that created their kingdoms more or less simultaneously in the tenth and eleventh centuries and opted for Christianity and with it, Western civilization. The similarities in our development are also striking. All
three countries became Westernized and all three were subject to attacks waged by Mongols, Turks and others from the East and the South, to the shifting of economic, trade and power centers from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic region, and, in modern history, to the global revolutionary nightmare of Bolshevism. No matter how westernized our economy and institutions were for several centuries, we were unable to close the gap between ourselves and Europe in historic moments like the French Revolution. Modern Europe was born in the French Revolution and took shape with the Atlantic cooperation and thus our three nations, alongside the Prussians, the Baltic nations, the Croatians, the Slovenians and, to some extent the Austrians, became Europe-in-between, different from both West and East, cut into pieces by the peace treaties following World War One, and thrown as prey to the Soviet empire by the peace treaties following World War Two. Europe-in-between, secluded from the rest of the World, Western civilization and evolution, the global market not only by a symbolic Iron Curtain, but in a very real sense, too.

While our region was divided and then had to get through the experience of Soviet pseudo-integration, Inner Europe, and especially the French and German area underwent a genuine integration process and furthermore drew the peripheries toward the center: first Scandinavia, then Southern and Southwestern Europe as far as Portugal, Greece and Turkey. The eighties brought what many of us believed in, while doubting its closeness: the United States of America won the Cold War arms race and the great adversary, the Soviet Union collapsed economically and politically. However, the price of this victory should not be underestimated: America is no more the undisputed leader of world economy and is forced to wage tough negotiations with Japan and the European Communities whose economic center is Germany.

Dear Friends,

Let me remind you even though I am sure you are aware that the countries of our region were not passive observers of this global conflict and global restructuring. It was the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 that first shook the Soviet empire and proved to the world that we want to live as free citizens, not as subjects of an empire. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 dealt the first blow to the wall dividing Europe and to the Soviet
empire itself. The second blow was the wonderful Prague Spring of 1968 in Czechoslovakia, the third: Polish Solidarity in 1981. Our revolutions failed but demonstrated the impossibility of the Yalta deal, started recurrent social, economic and political reforms in our region to the extent that Hungarian diplomacy even played a significant role in paving the way for German unity. It is not an exaggeration to say that the revolutions of our region just as the reforms in Hungary played an important role in shaping Gorbachevian thinking.

So we have fought our fight. Still, the transformation of the region including that of Hungary called systemic change brought not only joy and fresh hope, but also concerns and problems, not for us only, I presume. The world expected the changes but was caught by surprise by their speed and was not ready to answer the questions arising. This is true for the United States, too. While the vision of the world was one of bipolar nuclear balance and East-West conflict, things were easier to understand. It was easier to maintain America's leading role. It was easier to take care of problems. Now the new democracies including Hungary, and the nations aspiring to democracy, the nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States expect efficient assistance, mostly to create their market economies. At present, reality consists basically of declarations of the intention to help and, in the case of the CIS, of humanitarian assistance, partly stemming from the fear from the dangers of the unforeseeable consequences of possible social turmoil, massive migration, and nuclear arsenals getting out of hand. As for the countries of East Central Europe, there is a strong concern that our region will be devaluated economically and politically and Western interest, Japanese and Korean included, will turn solely towards Russia and other important members of the CIS as indicated by certain signs. In other words our countries, our ferryboat countries would have to turn back right after having set out for the Western shore.

We have seen other concerns rise in the region, even if not in Hungary. Some think that the Germany created through reunification will, by virtue of its economic and political dominance, annex the East Central European countries as its own peripheries. However, let us not forget that the surplus capital Germany can mobilize is exhausted by the needs of reviving the East German provinces: one hundred fifty million marks were
transferred from West Germany to the Eastern provinces in 1991 and two thirds of this enormous amount had to be spent on social welfare. As Hungarian and East Central European modernization strategies cannot be independent from the evolution of Germany and its policies vis-a-vis Central and Eastern Europe, some worry that assisting the successor states of the former Soviet Union, stemming primarily from security considerations, might be more important for Germany than helping the East Central European region, stemming primarily from economic considerations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This brief and sketchy rather than deep exposé only serves to demonstrate what you are likely to know already: East Central Europe’s joining the more fortunate Western part of Europe is a long, difficult and contradictory process bringing not only the joy of humanism rediscovered and the possibility of a united Europe at last, but also the burdens stemming from the further disintegration of the already distorted and underdeveloped economies and the deprivation of the doubtful safety provided by the former Soviet market in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire and its satellites. Burdens, because our countries have to struggle with the remnants of post-totalitarianism and the fading away of our democratic traditions over the last few decades. Burdens, because we feel that the West is hesitant and does not possess the financial means needed for a fast and effective material and spiritual integration of the countries of our region to the West.

To be sure, I am convinced there is no other possible goal for us but to reach the safehaven of the Western shore. Furthermore, I am convinced there is no way of creating stability in Eastern Europe, in the successor states of the Soviet Union by leaping over East Central Europe and disregarding interests of its countries. Quite the contrary! The ability of our countries and region to serve as mediators can be a significant contribution to modernization in Russia, the Ukraine and Eastern Europe in general. I think the equilibrium of our continent requires a reorganization of the former Soviet area with Russia not as a superpower but a big power and the Ukraine as a regional power. This reorganization in turn requires modernization, economic and political as a prerequisite.
The road to modernization leads partly through us, East Central Europeans, both in the geographic and figurative sense. On the other hand we ourselves need support, not in the form of humanitarian gifts but in that of foreign productive capital we are prepared to receive, so that the net outflow of capital can cease at long last and our countries can become genuine market economies and real markets for the West.

To put this in other words: either the West proves capable of integrating or perhaps only attaching Central and Eastern Europe to itself, or it excludes us from Europe that can only be incomplete without us. Should this latter happen, uncontrollable, dangerous trends may emerge in Eastern Europe once again while Europe-in-between may not be a connecting link but a vulnerable buffer zone economically and politically speaking.

I do believe that the West will recognize its own interests. Recognize that it is essential to rebuild the human and physical infrastructure disconnected after World War Two if we are to achieve stability in Europe and modernization and development all over. This is all the more inevitable because there are indications that the center of growth in Europe is shifting to the East as a result of German reunification and Central and East European changes. Former centers of growth in Southern Germany, Northern Italy, Switzerland and Western Austria may well be complemented by another one around Berlin as soon as the mid-nineties. This shift towards the East and the European integration process in general ask for the creation of the infrastructures of rapprochement. I see a need to develop an infrastructural axis in the Northern tier of our continent running from Berlin through Poland to the Baltic states. A second such axis would also run from West to East, starting in the former center of growth in Southern Germany through Hungary to the Ukraine, with an extension to the Balkans and eventually the Middle East, thereby attaching Slovenia and Croatia to itself. A third such axis would run North-South from the Baltics to the Balkans. New centers of growth would emerge in the intersections of the axes described here in the not too distant future and, if I may add in brackets, one of these intersections would be on Hungarian territory.
Dear Friends,

I hope you will forgive me for unveiling my vision of the future before speaking of the rather tough problems of the present. If I did so, I did assuming that it may be easier to bear the occurrences of the present in the light of the possibilities offered by the future.

In fact, a lot happened to us and around us over the last few months and years. I consider the associated membership of the Czech and Slovak Republic, Poland and Hungary, the three countries of our region in the European Communities particularly significant. It is important and reassuring for us that the new American security policy prepares to provide extensive guarantees to the East Central European countries should history reverse itself and give rise to a new threat, be it called Soviet or else. Until a definitive system of security and integration into Europe is worked out for East Central Europe, regional and subregional cooperation is the only way of rapprochement and of closing the gap. Regional cooperation includes the initiatives of our recent history known as the Hexagonale and the Visegrád Three, that is Czechoslovak-Polish-Hungarian cooperation. Subregional initiatives aim at establishing cooperation among the many smaller areas divided by national borders but united by natural links. The making of these cooperations is extremely important and promising even though they present a number of problems to be solved and a number of prejudices to be shaken off if they are to work well and bring benefit to all of us. To tell you why this is so in detail would take another full lecture, so let me just refer here to the fact that the many peoples of our region lived through the great experience of becoming a nation late, if at all, and incompletely. Even graver were the consequences of the fact that the two movements of democratism and nationalism could not assert themselves in unison in Central and Eastern Europe in spite of their common roots and connections. As one of the greatest Hungarian political thinkers of our century wrote: “taking possession of the community of the nation and the liberation of Man were disconnected”. Neither the peace treaties ending World War One, nor the forced internationalism of the Soviet era could moderate the often artificially engendered hatred of peoples, nations and ethnic groups against each other. The exact opposite happened as demonstrated not only by the fratricidal Southern Slav bloodshed ultimately leading to the disintegration of Yugoslavia, or the crowds firing at each other in the Soviet
successor state of Moldavia, but also the grudge and ill will restricting minority rights in multiethnic states.

Nonetheless, we in the region not only have to live side by side, we also have to work together to get integrated into Europe. Our plans for regional and subregional cooperation cannot be really successful until every people of the region puts an end to its exclusive nationalism, creates an inclusive patriotism and truly open borders. Nor can they be really successful until we put order in our economies, something that needs more than just the will to cooperate.

The greatest disillusion of the East Central European and East European countries since the beginning of the efforts aiming at political transformation or systemic change may well have been the hesitation, ambiguous attitudes and the lack of comprehensive plans of support and cooperation on the part of the economically developed regions of the world including the European Communities, the United States and Canada, and the East Asian centers of growth in Japan and Korea. The modest and poorly coordinated assistance originating from these regions seems to be designed not to serve modernization and take-off but to avert the immediate danger of a social explosion and to keep social conflicts down to their current level. And yet, Hungary just like the other East Central European countries needs support for modernization and not social charity.

We on our part would like to build close economic ties with Western Europe including Germany, with the United States and Canada, with Japan and Korea alike, starting from the fact that it is beneficial for a small country to have its economic relations rest on several legs.

Hungarians are pleased to observe that the United States supports the East Central European countries in the process of democratization and the building of a market economy and Hungary enjoys the most favorable assessment on this side of the Atlantic. This may well be the reason for our becoming a cooperating member in the COMO committee, our enjoying preferential tariffs treatment in several fields and our getting closer to settling the remaining outstanding issues in our trade relations. As a clear sign of your favorable assessment and support, American private investment in Hungary is now close to one and a half billion dollars and
we have three hundred joint ventures. I am also aware that American capital in Hungary is serving good causes, not only Hungarian. Our associated membership in the European Communities holds not only concern, but also benefits for the United States, and so does our closeness to the republics of the former Soviet Union, our knowledge of and ties with them. All things considered, I think my country offers more opportunities and greater safety for honest investors than is reflected in the current level of investment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have used and abused your patience long enough. Still, I would like to conclude by emphasizing that the three most developed regions of the world should not forget about East Central Europe including Hungary because an adequate level of understanding and investment on your part will help us become important partners of yours politically and economically. I am convinced that it is in the best interests of the West to help transform these countries into real markets and thereby make them economically viable. To integrate, not to exclude them. Not just because this is the way to make Europe, incomplete for centuries, a whole, but also because it is the historic mission of our region to connect the two Europes physically and spiritually, to integrate the East into the West. I believe it is only with us and through us that the fervently hoped, secure United Europe free of conflicts, mistrust and hatred can become a reality.

(Commencement speech, Ohio State University, Columbus, March 20, 1992)