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## Opening Address

A lot of thinking needs to be done at our conference today. For we have decided to stand between the past and the future and face a new reality. This affords an excellent opportunity to come up with a serious account of our hopes, fears, and expectations. Some say that the old spirit of Europe is fading out. Is this true? Sometimes, some voices may be unsettling. I would like to quote Robert Kaplan, the well-known American writer, essayist, and political analyst who, in his study of transforming geopolitical patterns, published recently under the title *The Return of Marco Polo's World*, observes: "as Europe disappears Eurasia coheres". This is indeed a very challenging statement. One may shrug and say – oh, those words come from the other side of the Atlantic. But voices of concern striking the same note can also be heard in Europe. Bruno Maçães, the Portuguese intellectual, writer, and politician, lately published a thought-provoking book under the very telling and symptomatic title *The Dawn of Eurasia*, in which he attempts to grasp the moment of change that is now opening a new space in culture, economy, geopolitics. What can come of this? What we must be ready for? Can we hear the voices of tomorrow in today's reality? The questions are many. Who has the capacity to address them: prophets, politicians, scientists?

One of America's scholars, Charles Kupchan, predicts: in a world which released the energy of quick change, patterns of identity will have to erode. In the decades to come – we can read in his study *No One's World: The West, The Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* – "a divers set of orders" will be more likely to emerge than a tightly-knit global system offering clear priorities. Should we consider Europe's fate in this perspective? Are we doomed to see it drifting in a vibrant spectrum of uncertainty, shaped by unfocused forces of global instability?

To bring a grain of optimism, allow me to make one more quote from Robert Kaplan. "Leadership – he writes – is not a choice, it is fate". The leadership of Europe has been its fate over hundreds of years. How does this look today, when the influence of the East is on the rise, leaving its imprint everywhere, and we are undergoing this new experience of being fundamentally challenged? Bruno Maçães wants us to embrace a new picture and realize that the symbolism of the West as the ruling power is fading, and we must be ready for a historical shift. Is this pessimism or realism? Should we adopt this new sensitivity? Should we follow this message, and look upon Europe's history through the prism of the new experience of being fundamentally challenged?

This is something for our consideration. But our future is already just around the corner – and this conference, so I believe – will bring it closer to us.