

ATLAS NETWORK EUROPE LIBERTY FORUM. Madrid, 24.05.24

TOAST TO FREEDOM

JAVIER FERNÁNDEZ-LASQUETTY

It's a great honor for me to be here tonight. You are very generous, Brad. First of all, a confession: I have spent more than 20 years in politics. That's to say, I come from the dark side. And regardless of that past, you are offering me the incredible honor of speaking here tonight. I'm no longer in politics now, and I certainly will never stop being a liberal, promoting liberty for individuals and societies to flourish.

Congratulations to Atlas Network for this fantastic Europe Liberty Forum 2024! The speakers were fantastic, and the topics were important. I'd like to extend my congratulations and thanks to Brad Lips and the entire Atlas Network team for their incredible work.

I'd also like to congratulate the Fundación para el Avance de la Libertad for being the co-host of this great event. Well done!

Spain plays an important role in the liberal movement. Since Juan de Mariana and the School of Salamanca, back in the seventeenth century, Spain has been at the forefront of the liberal movement. This Forum is an example. A Spaniard now presides over the Mont Pelerin Society, Gabriel Calzada, president of the University of the Hesperides. Six years ago Universidad Francisco Marroquín opened a campus here. Spain is home to some of the most important and active think tanks and foundations in Europe. They generate ideas, reports, and arguments that help expose people to the principles of a society of free and responsible people.

All of this is important! What you do in your own country is important. It inspires and gives ideas. I have personally experienced it myself. In the Region of Madrid, freedom advances because there were people and think tanks that generated ideas and alternative proposals to the socialism of the mainstream.

That is why Madrid resisted the pandemic without lockdown.

That is why, in Madrid, we made 20 tax cuts in just four years!

That is why, in Madrid, we declared war on over-regulation: more than 200 regulations repealed or eased in just four years!

And this is working! Madrid is growing twice as fast as the national average. Ideas matter!

This has been done in the Region of Madrid by the government of Isabel Díaz Ayuso, of which I was a member. This was possible because there were people, organizations, and think tanks like yours that had been working every day in favor of the free market, in favor of respect for private property, in favor of the elimination of state barriers and privileges.

Hayek wrote that "without principles we drift". That's why we have to be optimistic! Here in this room, we have principles, and we know they are better! And not only do they produce results. They are morally superior. Socialism is always coming up with new ways to present itself, and it's always the same: it's full of resentment, confrontation, and distrust in the ability of individuals to make their own decisions.

We see it in Spain and we see it in Europe: those who want more state and less freedom. Whatever party they belong to, what they really want is for people to follow their commands. In exchange for a subsidy. Or to avoid being fined! We want something better. We want people who are responsible, who go as far as they can with their ingenuity and creativity, taking risks. We don't want people who obey.

The mainstream says that Europe has to be the world champion of regulation. We know that we will do better if we are the world champion of freedom.

It says that the real European model is to have hardly any economic growth. That is not true.

Let's be clear: a fearful, protectionist Europe, behind a wall of tariffs and regulation, is not in anyone's interest. What is in our interest is a free Europe, open to trade and innovation!

Let's be clear: it's not the culture of cancellation and political correctness that is European. What is truly European is free thinking and a critical spirit.

What is truly European is not educational egalitarianism, but having very clear concepts such as freedom, effort, merit, and reward.

I believe that European identity is based on Western values: individual freedom, personal responsibility, the rule of law, tolerance, an entrepreneurial spirit, and the ambition to make the world a better place.

We know that there are threats to Europe, but we also know that we can overcome them. Russia has invaded a European country, Ukraine, and we all support Ukraine! We know that Hamas cruelly murders Jews, and that is a threat to any European. But we also know that we can overcome this threat!

The hope for Europe is to hold on tight to Western values. Neither Europe nor America must deny the Atlantic dimension that preserved its freedom in the 20th century and helped bring down the Berlin Wall and defeat communist tyranny. The future of freedom depends on our ability to renew this vital bond.

The threats are clear and present. Meanwhile, Europe has never experienced such incredible prosperity. This human flourishing is precisely because of Liberty.

That is why the work that the Liberty movement is doing all over Europe is so important. Keep up the great work! Everywhere, on any issue, whenever we place the ideas of liberty in front of people, we are winning minds.

That is why we are going to toast together.

Let's toast with optimism!

Let's toast with courage!

There's nothing more important than freedom. Let's toast to freedom!