**Guy Verhofstadt,** *on behalf of the ALDE Group***.** – Mr President, I would like to ask Prime Minister Orban whether he remembers the first time that we met. Mr Orban, it was in a hotel in Budapest in December 1989. I do not remember its name, but I remember our meeting because before it I had a meeting with SDSZ, the old Liberal Party, and then I asked you, as the leader of Fidesz, why you were not with your mother party in the meeting room and you explained why this was. I remember that it was just a few months before the successful participation of Fidesz in the first free elections in Hungary. By the way, at that time you were helped by George Soros – I remember that – and had a programme at that time that was more or less a little bit more progressive, I should say, than the programme of the SDSZ at that time. I would say that it was more social liberal and a little bit like Emmanuel Macron at that time. I would say that you were the Emmanuel Macron of Hungary in 1989. I do not think that Emmanuel Macron will be pleased with what I have said today. I did not say it in French so I hope that not much will be made of it.

But let us be honest: a lot has changed since 1990 and 1989 when we saw each other. You changed. You dumped your democratic principles and, in a certain way, you say openly that you want to create, not a liberal democracy, but that you want to have an illiberal state. At the moment the list of what you have done is a long one: harassing NGOs, chasing critical media away, building walls, your attempt to reinstate the death penalty in your country, even when this is not possible based on our treaties, and now you have decided to close down a university. I would ask you how far will you go? What is the next thing? Burning books on the square in front of the Hungarian Parliament, the so‑called Lajos Kossuth Square? Will that be the next thing? Perhaps the books of Kartes or maybe of Konrad, perhaps the books of what is one of my favourite writers in Hungary, Sandor Marai, because Sandor Marai was a Hungarian cosmopolitan who you are attacking at the moment. When I look at you, you seem to be proud of this and to think that it is fantastic that I can say all this here. What I am seeing more and more is not a proud conservative – because in the meanwhile you have become a proud conservative – but a sort of modern day version of the old communist Hungary – economic protectionism, excessive nationalism, the search for an illiberal state – and you see enemies of the Hungarian State everywhere. You see enemies in the energy sector, in the media, in the NGOs and now also in the academic world. It is like having Stalin or Brezhnev back, but now in Hungary. They also had that time of paranoia. It is not enough to have a majority in a democracy, but you have to chase them and go after them when they have another opinion.

So, Mr Orban – and I will conclude with this – Hungary became a member of the European Union in 2004. You and your predecessors signed up to the values of the Union and you know all these principles very well. Even the left or the right in this House respect them. You have in fact violated every single one of these principles in the different cases that Mr Timmermans mentioned. Yet you want to remain a member of the European Union. Well I have in fact got more respect for the decency of Eurosceptics, who will at least say that they do not like the European Union and its values and that they are leaving. You want to continue getting money from the European funds, taking the European Union’s money, but you do not want the European values. They are not for you. What would you call that? Not very courageous, I should say, and certainly not in line with a politician based on principles. So my question to you is to ask whether you think that it is time to make a choice again, as you made that choice when you became, after being a Liberal Democrat, a little bit nationalist and a conservative? Is it not the time to ask yourself in your soul how you wish to be remembered in the future? Do you want to be remembered as somebody who liberated your country, Hungary, from communism – and you did that – or do you want to be commemorated as an eternal enemy of our open European democratic society? That is the choice that you have to make now.

*(Applause)*