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During the afternoon session of the Economics Festival in Trento, Jan Zielonka sat down and discussed the many mistakes the liberal elites have made over the past 30 years.

Out With the Old and in With the New: An Inside Look at the Liberal Elites Governing the West

Jan Zielonka presented a different point of view in his discussion titled, “The Errors of the Elite at the Origin of Sovereignism” where he talks about the tendency of liberal elites to point their fingers at others but take no responsibility for their part in the issues of Europe today.

During this session of the Trento Economics Festival, Jan Zielonka gave a presentation on the current status of Europe and where those who are currently in power went wrong. He begins by saying that he tries to understand how we went from a liberal revolution to an illiberal revolution. This concept is confusing to Zielonka because this illiberal revolution is an attack on everything we have thought to be obvious and natural. He emphasizes the fact that the issues we see in Europe today are not solely about the economy. They are about numerous topics or about the “whole package.” He went on to ask, “What is wrong with the rule of law” to which he answered his own question with “nothing is wrong with it, it was the way we went about everything involving the rule of law.” He says that we compromised on a lot of things that created confusion about freedom and justice which are supposed to be so obviously liberal.

Zielonka states that liberalism was created to control those in power, but today we see liberalism being used as a tool to contain and execute power. In this context, he says that even though we may have a vote, many of us do not feel as if we have a voice. Many people do not feel represented by the current parties in power. Even if these people voted for the candidates who represented their ideas, they still could not change anything.

This leads into Zielonka’s point about crisis. He says, when we discuss crisis, it is important to acknowledge that crisis did not fall from the sky and occur over night. Globalization did not come from China and inequalities have been around forever, they are not a new phenomenon. He points out that when all of these different issues were occurring the populists were not in power. They were not in control when inequalities began to rise rapidly. When these issues were happening, the liberal media was not writing about these topics. He highlights the fact that no one asks the questions “who is responsible” when liberals are in power. He gives the example of Brexit saying, “Nobody asks the question who lost Great Britain?” and the Brits are not the only ones paying for this.

Moving to immigration, Zielonka questions whether people became xenophobic because the populists manipulated them. He says maybe, but if you look at the record of policies towards North Africa and the Middle East, everything we have done over recent years has involved cutting development aid and not helping businesses invest in the regions. He continues by saying we befriend politicians like Ghaddafi and ask them to keep migrants away from the shores, we bomb them and then we act surprised when people begin to flee. He reiterates the fact that when all of these events were happening, the populists were not in power. Zielonka says not only is this immoral but there is no one who is taking responsibility for these actions.

Zielonka emphasizes that we cannot rely on the status quo to improve the issues that currently exist. We have to start thinking seriously of new ways to organize the markets, democracy and integration. Currently,

Zielonka says that he does not see any new ideas. He finishes with the idea that we cannot continue to try to solve 21st century issues with 19th century solutions. We need to better adapt to the new Europe. There is no simple way back to where Europe used to be. Merkel and Macron will not be able to solve all of the problems in Europe. Europe has failed to adjust; the liberal ideals have been betrayed and we need to begin to question the complacency of the West in order to deliver results.

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