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Speech by Aleksi Aaltonen for LSE alumni and offer holders
LSE Alumni Association Finland event at the British Embassy in Helsinki

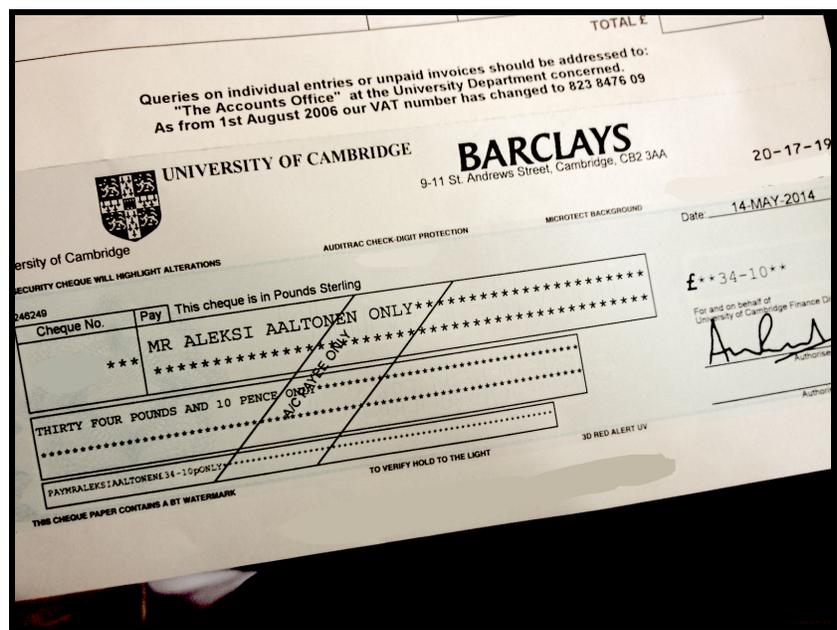
Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is honour to be here and I would like thank Tuuli and LSE Alumni Finland for giving me this opportunity. I am going to talk about the fact that many decisions that shape our society are made outside national borders. In a sense, this is a trivial statement we all know. However, as I follow Finnish media it is quite worrying that many parts of our society have not yet come to terms with it. In a small country like Finland, global problems and competition are very much present in everyday politics, business and academic research.

Who I am. I moved to London in 2006 to do a PhD in Management at LSE. I had just broken up with my long-time girlfriend and it was very much jump to unknown. The move was made possible by British Scholarship I received from the British Council, and, actually, the last time I was speaking here was at the award ceremony of British Scholarships in 2009. I completed my studies in 2011 and I am currently a Visiting Fellow at LSE until the end of August when I start as an Assistant Professor at Warwick Business School. After my PhD, I have also founded a startup company that was sold to Facebook in spring.

I am going to raise a few critical issues for Finland in the European and global scene. I do this from the perspective entrepreneurship and academic research. They are topics that I have personal experience and they offer, I think, a good window into the contemporary world.

Let me start from entrepreneurship. Finnish economy is not doing too well. Great companies such as Stockmann and Sanoma are in big trouble, not to mention Nokia. The Government has just bailed out shipbuilding in Turku and if Russia bans European airlines from using its airspace we may have to say goodbye to Finnair. It is not that these companies have done something particularly wrong but the world is simply changing around them. The future of a small country cannot be built by hanging on to old institutions, however much we love them. We need to move faster than our bigger friends are able to do. Let me give you a random illustration of opportunities that exist out there.



This is a cheque I received from the University of Cambridge to reimburse my job interview costs in spring. Now, you don't need a doctorate in economics to understand that it's not particularly efficient to use a piece of paper to send money from Cambridge to a person in London. If you start counting how many people and how much work is involved in the transaction – instead of just wiring the money to my bank account – you get the picture. Rather than poking fun at Cambridge – that is a great institution – I see an opportunity to do things smarter and, perhaps, make a business out of it.

Historically, educated Finns have not viewed entrepreneurship as an attractive career choice. Against this background, there has been an remarkable growth in entrepreneurial culture in

Finland. For instance, clean technology, resource sharing, new forms of healthcare and wellbeing provide lots of big and small problems waiting to be solved and it is very promising how Finns are starting to think how to make business out of them.

Now, a major obstacle that Finland cannot tackle domestically is that Finnish consumer and capital markets are simply too small to sustain entrepreneurial industry. For instance, it's virtually impossible to build an IT product for the domestic market. Also, while Finland can become a great place to start a company, there is not enough capital to fund scaling up the business. For these reasons, the idea of internationalization of business is largely outdated in many industries, since products and teams must be built from the ground up with global markets in mind. At the moment, US west coast is still the Mecca for growth entrepreneurs but my dream is that Europe could sustain its own entrepreneurial industry.

Let me move to my second example of global competition. Relevant academic research is international, and if you want to become a serious academic you cannot stick to Finland. Many of my fellow PhD students from LSE didn't even consider returning home but are now working in the US, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Netherlands, and so forth. When I was recruited to Warwick Business School I was competing with candidates from Switzerland and Canada. I wish to make two quick points about academic work today.

First, unless you aim for the very top, I don't see a reason to become a researcher in an university. You are much better off by making money in industry or by getting a stable government job. Second, there is currently a lot of anxiety and talk about the measurement of academic productivity. You may have heard your teachers complaining about being measured, universities being ranked and pressure to publish in international journals. This all means that even if you are based in a Finnish university, there is no escaping the global academic competition.

On the other hand, the upshot is that young academics are in a good position, since we don't have vested interests in old structures. If you take the publication metrics as the rules of a game you have decided to play, they become much less depressing. Getting published in the top

journals is not rocket science unless you are in the field of rocket science. However, it is a lot of hard work. If you are not ready to work hard, why should the taxpayer fund your hobby?

Contemporary entrepreneurship and academic research are fundamentally international activities. However, I am sure that those of you who are interested, for instance, in politics can recognize similar trends in your field. At the same time, there is still a lot of ambiguity in Finland how to cope with international competition. To me, the answer is clear. A small nation without oil must move swiftly and seize new opportunities faster than major geopolitical powers are able to do.

To conclude, if all this is clear to you then you are in a much better position than I when I was leaving to LSE. Also, if you are leaving for LSE with the mindset that afterwards you return to Finland and get a job here, I suggest you think twice. Why not take the opportunity to look for a job in the UK or let your studies take you to some other place in the world you don't even know yet? I can assure it will make your studies much more interesting and, in the end, you will probably become much more valuable for society than by returning home straight away. I can hardly think of a better place than LSE and London to start such an adventure.