

*CHECK AGAINST DELIVER*



# ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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## **ADDRESS**

Notes on Europe

**Berlin**

**Humboldt University**

*25 October 2010*

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

- I am delighted to have the honor and the privilege of addressing you here at the Humboldt University today and should like to thank Professor Dr. Jan-Hendrk Olbertz for the opportunity to mull over in public a few - private - thoughts on Europe.
  
- The Humboldt brothers and this University, home to so many great Europeans that shaped our world over the past two centuries, are indeed inspirational for anyone who dares to wander in the arcane world of our present times.
  
- The Humboldt brothers lived at an age when intellectual, scientific and cultural life in Europe was dominated by rationalist worldviews in which everything was open to rational examination and criticism.
  
- The extraordinary development of scientific thought, in particular of natural sciences but also the emergence of economic and political thought, as well as the French revolution in 1789, this laid the foundations of modern western political and intellectual culture.

- The interesting point here is made by Habermas who credits to the Enlightenment the rise of the “public sphere” in Europe, even if “public” at that time remained rather exclusive and limited to an “elite” of intellectuals or “men of letters”.
- However, this emergence of “public opinion” or civil society allowed for a kind of a collective process of self-consciousness that resulted in democracy, which is integral for our contemporary debates.
- This is all about the times when the founders of this University lived, all about the birth of modern Europe, brought about by the collapse of the Ancien Régime.
- Idealizing the past is not a good thing, but forgetting it is much worse. These are words by Tony Judt. I couldn’t agree more with him because one has to keep an eye on the past while looking into the challenges of the present if a better future is to be built on.
- So let me deliver my remarks as a sort of a musical composition in two tempos:

## ***First tempo - From past to present***

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

- Over the past decade, this tribune has been used by honorable speakers to go beyond the circumstantial evidence that grabs headlines on European affairs, to articulate concerns and express their vision for Europe.
- Indeed one may wonder why Europe is always in such need of a vision, always caught in deficit – deficit of conceptualization, deficit of attention, deficit of trust, deficit of reconciliation.
- To a certain extent, the reason for this deficit is quite simple and natural – after all the European Union is a complex ongoing process which is never made but always in the making.
- As an open system with many parts in an intricate arrangement that continuously interact with the environment, the European Union is very much an unpredictable and uncertain social and political artifact.

- The modern scientific paradigm of information sciences shed new light on the European Union and allows us to understand how this unique and unprecedented political project is linked to a worldview rooted in a long intellectual, cultural, scientific and civilizational tradition shared - in various degrees and with nuances – by all Europeans.
- I don't think that an ambitious uniting political project such as this one could ever have been built out of the rubble of a war-torn century, had we lacked this common ground that makes Europeans share a number of basic beliefs or cognitive, affective and ethical assumptions about the world.
- Indeed in such extreme circumstances, the survival of all belligerents was at stake and a new beginning was absolutely necessary for all. What emerged from the famous Hague Congress in 1948 was precisely a new soul for Europe.
- I would like to insist on this point. How could one dare to embark on such an ambitious search for unity if peoples were not sharing a number of common beliefs or if a consensus between their different worldviews was not possible?
- By this common ground, I mean the cultural heritage that underpins the European history and that ultimately allows us to shape a sense of belonging to the same group or community and build up a common future.

- At the risk of annoying some of you, I might be tempted to point out our common heritage: the Greco-Roman legacy (democracy rooted in free speech and debate among people's representatives in the *agora* or public square and justice as a starting point of law, *or jus*, that regulates the exercise of political power, freedom and equality); our Judeo-Christian roots which, by way of tensions and rivalry, are linked with Islam forming together what some call "the Mediterranean monotheism"; the rift between East and West that grew in the Middle-Ages and was further accentuated by the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and its integration in the Ottoman Empire, marking the starting point of Europe's identification with the West, regardless of any geographical reason, which still feeds many of the ambiguities of contemporary Europe; the unfading archetype of the "empire", that Charlemagne founded in Aix-la-Chapelle, a long way from the Mediterranean, renovated by the ideal of Christian universality and the assimilation of Roman law, unable to solve the crucial issue of whether supreme authority should be vested in the Pope or the Emperor; the everlasting break-up of Christian unity and the emergence of a Europe of Christianities: Greek Orthodox in the East, in the West, Catholicism, later divided into Protestantism in the North and Catholicism in the South; the birth of nations, as an exercise in sovereignty endowed with a national religion and language which divided Europe politically and that the French Revolution provided with political power.

- Let me stress this last point because modern European history is all about Nation-States affirming their sovereignty, zealous of their authority and independence and seeking to maintain a certain balance – if possible, a just balance of power, according to the Treaty of Westphalia.
  
- Nevertheless, as we all know, European history is also riddled with hegemonic ambitions, rivalries, alliances and adverse coalitions. Coalitions in which big states confront big states, the small states acting as a counterweight, forming alliances here and there according to the interests at stake.
  
- The principle of nationalities, as an expression of the political goal of making State and Nation coincide, was progressively asserted during the 19th century and eventually consolidated as a principle of international law expressed in the right of nations to self-determination.
  
- The decolonization that followed the World War II, corresponding to the implementation of this right, brought a new challenge for European nations in search for a new world map where Europe ceased to be the centre and just became another continent.

- A continent among others, and that furthermore was arbitrarily divided for fifty years, and that the European integration strongly helped to reunite pushing its borders further to the east and the south-East.
  
- The reunification of Europe raises indeed the geopolitical question of its eastern borders, just as it makes us ponder on the finalities of this common project. These are open questions that need firther reflection.

## Excellencies

- Europe is aimed at securing peace and prosperity by guaranteeing frontiers, development and mutual understanding among peoples. But is it all? Can we push frontiers and move borders further and further each time? Are there geographical limits to this political project? Is this related to the vexed question of the European identity, to the conception Europeans have about themselves?

- In my view, what is special about Europe is to be found in its diversity, in its capacity to value differences and integrate diversity – of language, religions, philosophies, social organization, lifestyles. So, first point, we need to recognize our differences so that we can respect them and learn from them.
  
- But – second point - we have also to know what unites us across our diversities, contrasts and contradictions. What binds us together, what we want and how much can we do together. How best we can use our strengths to overcome our weaknesses.
  
- This is all about our identity, a question that cannot be seen as a luxury. Not only because perpetual self-questioning is part of our mindset but also because identities are always in the making as a continuously building up process.
  
- Indeed, in our quest for identity, we need for sure to look backward to the past. But only just as we absolutely have to look also forward to the future because of “our freedom to determine our loyalties and priorities between our affiliations, the different groups to all of which we may belong” as Amartya Sen reminds us.

## ***Second tempo: From present to future***

Ladies and Gentlemen

- In creating the European Community – the Coal and Steel Community and later the Common Market – the main objective was peace.
  
- But after fifty years, are the cries of “never again” – in spite of the reminders of the tragedies not only of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, but also of Chechnya -, audible enough for today’s young Europeans who are lucky enough to have been brought up over times of peace. ?
  
- I really don’t think so. In spite of the strong need for peace, security and prosperity, war as a military threat within European borders is no more, and so much the better, one of the top concerns of peoples and therefore it cannot be seen a driving force for further European integration.
  
- Moreover we are probably too “blasé” to believe in the “European dream” as it was in the aftermath of the war, as Jacques Delors once put it.

- Therefore we need to refocus the *raison d'être* of the European integration on what unites peoples, on what supports each other's efforts thanks to the added value of a common approach, joint actions and common policies.
  
- As a political project the European Union has to give answers to the big challenges that our European countries are faced with: adaptation of our market economies to the great and fast changes taking place, adaptation of the so-called European social model to new demographic and budgetary constraints, adaptation of our democracies to cope with pluralism, respect human rights and minorities, adaptation of our societies to living in a world village that makes increasing diversity inevitable.
  
- These are our wars, the European wars of the twenty first century that Europe has to fight with soft power tools. Because, although prosperous and provided with a solid *acquis*, Europe is not freed from needs and aspirations of its peoples. But the wars to be fought are against poverty and unemployment; against inequalities; against economic decline; against divides within our societies; against exclusion, xenophobia, discrimination and related forms of intolerance.

- If Europe does not bring some assurance that concerns and aspirations of its citizens are taken up into consideration, if it does not add to States action, if it does not overcome their limitations, one may wonder what this marriage contract is all about.
  
- It is time for Europe to take the fears of its citizens seriously and address them. Fears feed frustrations, resentment and hostility. Fears ignite tensions that may de generate into violence.
  
- The crisis that we are living today in Europe – economic, financial, social, cultural and moral – has to be tackled at all levels, in particular at the European level. Because, in my view, it is not only one more circumstantial crisis, but a true paradigm shift that we are faced with.

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- We cannot ignore that the increasing diversity of our European societies – be it ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural – is generating growing anxiety among populations, driving communities apart and putting democracies under mounting pressure.

- In spite of being integral to Europe, cultural diversity has become a topical issue for our societies.
- The success of many far-right anti-immigration parties in various elections in European countries is a clear symptom of a growing malaise and unease. It illustrates how fears and prejudices may build into a social time-bomb across Europe if they are not addressed properly.
- The most widely accepted explanation for the success of extreme right parties suggests they are a response to economic distress, fears about the future of the social welfare state, and a reaction to the growing multi-culturalization of our societies.
- Probably all these questions are at stake. This is why we need an European agenda and leadership to confront this challenging situation.
- Let's avoid polarizing the debate and ignite tensions by making inflammatory statements about our shortcomings in dealing with migration issues. Let's also avoid denying problems and face challenges ahead.

- Let us ask what went wrong and where are the problems. Let us be honest and recognize that most of the times diversity stands for migration and that in continental Europe immigration and Islam are almost synonymous. Let's assume that cultural diversity is a problem in Europe in so far as it relates to migration and to integration of migrants.
- Let us ask why both western publics and Europe's Muslim minorities, particularly in cities and urban areas, feel quite anxious about their mutual bad relations.

Ladies and Gentlemen

- But what is at stake with Muslim minorities in Europe?
- In my view there are at least three main issues: a demographic issue since estimations point out that Muslims will account for about 10% of the population of the EU by 2020; an integration issue - but let's be clear: many problems affecting Muslims are common to other immigrant groups; and an identity issue.
- Indeed, the arrival of immigrants in any society has an impact on the host country's sense of self. It happens, for instance, in the United States with the Latino migrants; it has also happened in the past with flows of migration from southern countries, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

- Now in my view the point here is that there is a clash between Islamic and western societies and let's admit it.
- However, as William Pfaff puts it, it is not the "Huntington's clash of civilizations because, number one, Islam and West, although religious rivals within the same civilization, are members of Mediterranean monotheism"; number two, because civilizations are cultural phenomena and don't go to war as if they were nations contrary to what Huntington wrongly pretended.
- Now there is a clash and we need to acknowledge it. This clash is first of all a clash of ignorances because this essential connection between western and Islamic history is widely unknown, ignored or misunderstood.
- But there is also a clash of worldviews that makes a consensus between the two difficult – but not impossible - to achieve.
- This is all about world politics but also about fundamental questions concerning values, beliefs and customs.
- I will not address the issue of world politics here. But I would like to focus on the resurgent role of religion that is witnessed almost everywhere as a new challenge that has to be tackled.

- Even in Europe, where secularisation of religious behaviour made it a private affair, and secularism is responsible for the clear separation of state and religion, religious movements are thriving.
- Now the critical question to be asked is: what can we do at policy level to promote constructive dialogue between religious and secular systems?
- The problem in Europe seems to be that secularism no longer manages to ensure a constructive dialogue between religious worldviews, namely between Christianity and Islam, a dialogue that is possible, fruitful and necessary.
- My assumption here is twofold: being considered a system of beliefs, different religions can, if they have sufficient beliefs in common, hold a constructive dialogue between them and allow for cross-cultural exchanges. In this case, a consensus between different worldviews can be achieved.
- Secondly, Christianity and Islam worldviews embrace similar – or at least compatible - ethical and political commitments.
- So the following point is: How religious and secular systems go together and reinforce each other? What are the tools to be used in this approach? What is the role of religious pluralism ?

- I tend to think that we need to reflect further on pluralism, in particular on religious pluralism. Are we confronted with a new religious pluralism? Does it undermine the cultural and social foundations of democracy? Is it the reason why identity politics has become more salient?
  
- What's wrong with new religious diversity in secular Europe? Is it pluralism that is failing in our present times ?
  
- I don't have ready made answers to these questions. But this is no reason to give up - after all, looking back in history, it seems to me that the relation between pluralism and religion has never been free of ambiguities!

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- How we master the political, social, religious and cultural tensions that have emerged over the past decade will have a decisive impact on the future and health of democracy on our continent. At least this is my profound conviction.
  
- This is why I believe that developing the democratic governance of cultural diversity is a major political priority of international, European, national and local agendas. This is my first concluding point.

- Secondly, polarization and extremism in societies are on the increase. In order to tackle this problem, we need to avoid the pitfalls of a fundamentalist secular mindset. In other words, new strategies to manage and promote inter-religious dialogue as part of cultural diversity, based on universal human rights, should be developed.
  
- What does the interface between religious political doctrine and democracy really mean and how can suspicion between secular and religious political actors be overcome to allow for constructive dialogue? These are the questions to be asked.
  
- It is also time for political decision-makers to engage in initiatives underway that organize, facilitate and study on-going dialogue processes with diverse religious and secular political movements. These processes aim to enhance and facilitate meaningful dialogue and to explore ways in which decision-makers in both contexts can contribute to conflict prevention between as well as within countries and societies.

- My third point regards migration and integration of migrants in Europe. In my view a crucial indicator of the success of the entire European project will be the inclusion and integrations of migrants. In this regard, citizenship matters and eventually we need to go beyond citizenship in the sense of “better understanding the larger principles that citizenship is meant to signify” (Marc Howard, The politics of Citizenship in Europe).
- This means that we need a new European agenda related to migration, integration and citizenship. We need integrated perspectives and policies on migration and on integration. We need to develop democratic citizenship and participation. We need to learn and to teach intercultural competences to our citizens. We need to create urban strategies and policies for intercultural dialogue. We need to build intercultural and inter-ethnic cities.

## Excellencies

- Since its inception, the European project has faced many crises. In the sixties, common agriculture policy was the big challenge; in 1973 it was the energy crisis; in the nineties Europe faced twice a serious economic and financial crisis; at the turn of the century, democratic principles were at stake in one of the member States; more recently, we face the constitutional treaty crisis (2004);

- However each of these crises was an opportunity to go further in the European integration, to advance its goals.
  
- I trust that once again Europe will live up to our expectations and that it will show, as always, its capacity to start a new life from the ashes of fire - as a phoenix.
  
- Many thanks