

Humboldt-Reden zu Europa



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HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN



Walter Hallstein-Institut
für Europäisches Verfassungsrecht

Humboldt-Rede zu Europa

von

Mary McAleese

Staatspräsidentin von Irland

**"Europe in the Coming Times: an Irish
perspective"**

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- es gilt das gesprochene Wort -

ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT McALEESE
EUROPE IN THE COMING TIMES: AN IRISH PERSPECTIVE
HUMBOLDT UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN

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President Marksches

Professor Pernice

Dr Sabathil

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to be here today in this revered place of teaching, learning and informed debate about the future of Europe.

In choosing my title today, I am echoing a late-nineteenth century Irish poem in which the poet addresses an imagined future Ireland. It was written at a time of great flux, characterised by competing visions of our national destiny.

To try to conjure up an image of the future is a fundamental human trait. We do it all the time in our personal lives and in our communities. We are forever striving to improve our lives and the lives of those around us. This is the stamp of a responsible society which must never rest on its laurels or become self-satisfied.

There are occasions in history when our collective thinking about ‘the coming times’ becomes all the more vital. The opening decade of the twenty-first century is, I believe, just such a time.

I recently came across some words by Peter Drucker on the impact of large-scale change in history:

Every few hundred years throughout Western history a sharp transformation has occurred. In a matter of decades, society altogether rearranges itself, its world views, its basic values, its social and political structure, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later, a new world exists. And the people born into that world

cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born.

We are living, right this moment, through a period of flux just as Drucker describes. A powerful perception of rapid change gives rise to a sense of excitement at the enormous potential being unlocked, but has also given rise to a degree of uncertainty and apprehension about the dizzying pace of change and about our future direction.

This University's founder, the great philologist and expert in the origins of language, Wilhelm von Humboldt, has a special importance for us in Ireland. Humboldt was among the first experts to identify the Indo-Germanic group of languages. It was he who established that our native Irish language belonged to that family of European languages. Building on his work, later German linguists codified the grammar and structure of the language, but it was Humboldt's work which represented a moment of cultural re-awakening, and inspired a renewed sense of Ireland's belonging to a common European tradition. He introduced us, you could say to our DNA.

Cultural nationalism in Ireland went hand in hand with intense political debate about our relationship with Britain and the nature of Ireland's identity. Of course, Ireland's sense of belonging in Europe has deep roots in our history. It is illustrated in the lives of those like the seventh century Irish monk St Killian of Wurzburg, who came to help Europe secure its Christian values.

Humboldt's discovery that our national language, long derided and humiliated, was a full member of the family of European languages underlined the European pedigree of our culture. Since Humboldt's day, Ireland has consistently demonstrated, time and again, that Europe is indeed in our DNA and inseparable from our national destiny.

The European Union has travelled an immense distance since the founding generation developed their bold vision of Europe in their 'coming times', the second part of the twentieth century.

The dreadful upheavals of that century taught us harshly the importance of enlightened political leadership rooted in democratic and pluralist values. Europe's traumas brought forth the vision of great men like Adenauer whose goal was nothing less than "a great, common house for Europeans, a house of freedom".

Nothing represented the realisation of Adenauer's dream like the coming-down of the Berlin Wall, which had so disfigured this city and shamed this continent. Today, a revitalised Berlin gives living proof that no barrier is insurmountable and that no dividing line is ever permanent as long as the human spirit yearns for freedom.

Goals that would have seemed utopian in the 1950s, in a Europe still finding its post-war feet, have now been realised. Europe is peaceful, united and prosperous. We benefit daily from the single market and the existence of the Euro. Twenty-seven countries now work together in pursuit of shared ambitions founded on the very best of human values. From the ashes of war arose a structure built to last for centuries, but for that structure to last, it must accommodate change. The question "what's next?" begs to be answered, if Europe is to retain its role as a centre of gravity and sanity for the world. We can take satisfaction and reassurance in looking back at how far we have come but still our eyes must be on the coherent, stable and humanly decent future we are called to build one day at a time.

For more than twenty years, the Union has been preoccupied with its internal affairs. This preoccupation has produced a rich harvest, which has served Europe well. Ireland has been a particular beneficiary of this process and our economic fortunes have been transformed in the space of less than a generation.

There is now a growing consensus that the Union needs to look outward, beyond our borders. Our world is changing at an unrelenting pace. Many of the challenges now faced by national governments defy the boundaries of states, and even those of Europe. An issue like climate change, for example, demands a broader response.

In Irish we say *Ní neart go chur le cheile*: strength comes only when we act together. Our belief in collective action as the source of strength and the common good is interwoven into many traditional Irish sayings, and into the customs and practices of Irish life. *Meitheal*, for example, is a word we use to describe collective action to meet a challenge, and denotes a community gathering and working together. *Meitheal* is how generations of our ancestors worked the small farms of Ireland over the centuries, when neighbours rallied around to ensure that the work would be done and the harvest stored in good time. It is today how our communities, urban and rural are organised around neighbour helping neighbour. Without that we are mere strangers to one another. It is our

shared focus and shared responsibility that builds us into caring communities.

These ingrained values helped us to survive hard times 150 years ago when famine claimed millions of Irish lives, turning us into an emigrant nation and forever altering the trajectory of Irish history. From this grim experience we know well of the potential for environmental failure to become a terrible social and humanitarian disaster when the powerful stick rigidly to their mindset and beliefs, selfishly delaying action until it is too late.

With this in mind, Ireland's international relations are guided by the "ideal of peace and friendly cooperation amongst nations", the "pacific settlement of international disputes" and the "principles of international law as its rule of conduct in its relations with other States".

These principles guide our approach to relations with the wider world. We follow a policy of military neutrality and non-involvement in military alliances. But neutrality has not meant indifference. Our history and geography have helped to fashion our particular approach to international affairs, but we well understand that many of our European neighbours have made different choices, and we respect those choices.

Ireland has been an active member of the United Nations since 1955. Membership of the United Nations allowed us to develop our own distinctive role in the world, focused on issues such as development aid, disarmament and human rights.

From the beginning, we felt strongly the obligations imposed by membership. For the last fifty years, the Irish Defence Forces have had a continuous presence on United Nations peace support operations. Today, Irish servicemen and women serve in UN-mandated missions in Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and have a leading role in Chad. This service has not been without cost and many members of our Defence Forces have given their lives in the service of the United Nations. We are deeply proud of all who have served and who serve today.

The nature of peace support operations has changed over the decades and it is right that the European Union - arguably the most successful peace process in history - should develop its capacity to build peace elsewhere in the world. The Union's purpose is to consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, and to promote human rights. The Union's efforts to

preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security are all done in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

The Irish police service has also played its part. I look forward to their participation in the EU rule of law mission planned for Kosovo, where the European Union will play a vital role in ensuring peace and stability.

As we see it, our interests are best advanced through the pursuit of principled policies backed up by Europe's economic resources. Our vision of Europe is that it must strive to be a new type of power in the world, one that is founded on the pursuit of values as much as on the defence of interests. As a small country with a baleful experience of colonisation, Ireland has traditionally had grave reservations about Great Power politics. We see patient diplomacy, persistent, respectful dialogue and dogged persuasion as the best instruments for creating a better world. We value the contribution of international organisations and are unstinting in our support for the United Nations.

We see peace, development and human rights as being inextricably linked. We aim to be a world leader in development assistance, and are resolute in our commitment to reach the UN ODA target of 0.7% of GNP by 2012. This commitment enjoys wide public support in Ireland. The value of solidarity with the world's poor is strongly recognised by our people for it is a product of our own history of famine and underdevelopment. The Government through Irish Aid, our development aid programme, is giving practical expression to the defining values of modern Ireland. It is following, too in the footsteps of thousands of Irish men and women, lay and missionary, priests and nuns, soldiers and policemen, volunteers and aid workers, who for many years have offered themselves and their skills to the poorest and most troubled countries in the world, in many ways our finest ambassadors.

The island of Ireland has known generations - indeed centuries - of conflict but today our best educated and most high achieving generation ever has used its brain power to shift us from conflict to consensus. We hope that the journey we have made from violence to peace, will serve as an encouragement to other nations still mired in seemingly intractable conflict, and we are taking solid steps to transfer our knowledge in this area to other states, the first of which is Timor Leste.

In the years ahead, the Union has the potential to play an even greater role in promoting our shared European values and protecting our shared European interests around the world. A case in point is the problem of

global warming, which has the potential to damage not just our future interests but those of all humanity on an unparalleled scale. The global community has at last begun to rally in its efforts to spare future generations from the consequences of cataclysmic climatic changes. The agreement reached in Bali reassures us that an international consensus is mounting but Europe's destiny is as an international leader. As advanced economies, we occupy a privileged position and though there are undoubtedly real costs and sacrifices ahead, in truth we know that it is the world's most vulnerable who will first suffer the consequences. We are called to be their shield as well as our own. In Copenhagen in 2009 I hope the champions of coherent collective international action will be vindicated, among them your Chancellor and the Federal Government, who within the European Union and the G8 have articulated a vision on the climate change agenda that is praiseworthy indeed.

Germany has already made real progress in renewable energy technologies and we in Ireland are committed to a 33% target for electricity from renewable sources by 2020. We have set such ambitious targets because we firmly believe that it is only by investing in large-scale renewable energy programmes that we can create the incentives for research and industry that will make renewable energy cost effective and efficient as well as sustainable.

Europe is engaged in a great economic endeavour to equip our twenty-seven economies for the challenges and opportunities of the globalised world. Here in Germany, the largest exporter in the world, the traditional industrial heartland of Europe, you understand these issues better than most.

In the late nineteenth century, when the poem to which I referred earlier was written, the future tended to be seen in either national or imperial terms. In Ireland, we resisted the then-fashionable imperial vision of the world with its narrow elites and its overlooked masses. We insisted instead on a vision of the innate dignity of each human being and her or his right to freedom and to equality of opportunity. That vision was secured by insisting on an independent future for ourselves. Exercising our independence and our sovereignty we chose to join the European Union. It is in some ways our lodestar as we seek to plot a course through a changing world. We hope to see the Union develop its full potential as a prosperous knowledge economy, as a peaceful common homeland, as a champion of good values and good practice within the Union and around the world, as a witness to the power of partnership in diversity and to the

benefits that come from ending conflict and beginning consensus, as a friend to the world's poor and overlooked.

In this, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue many of our countries grow more multi-cultural, multi-faith and multilingual by the day. If we mean what we say about Europe's founding value system, with its reverence for the dignity of each human being, then our task is to build in our countries and throughout our Union a deep-rooted culture of acceptance of difference, of joyful curiosity about one another, and of respect, which allows strangers to live in harmony as neighbours and to become friends. Already in the movement of peoples throughout Europe, whether following the stars of economic opportunity, or tourism, or academic exchange, we see the emergence of the new Europe dreamt of by Schumann and Adenauer, a Europe of good neighbours, good friends, pulling together for a shared future and not pulling Europe apart for selfish ends. Now our generation faces a different world and different challenges but with the gift of the Union, the resource that is the Union as our bridge to our coming times. Will we make poverty history? Will we see an end to the misery of the Middle East? Will we see East and West grow in mutual understanding and harmony? Will the great faiths of the world become sources of unity and not discord? Will we stabilise our global climate? Will we give our children a legacy of optimism and hope such as has been given to no other generation in the known history of mankind?

Speaking in 1994, as Ireland began to emerge from its nightmare of violence and division, the Irish Nobel Laureate, John Hume described what has been achieved by the European project:

“...they can build common institutions which preserve their differences, which allow them to work their common ground... [giving] bread on your table, a roof over your head, the right to existence. Not just the right to life, but the right to a decent standard of living, to a home, to a job, to education, to health... [T]hey broke down the prejudices of centuries to make the healing process take place...’

That feat, that extraordinary achievement, is our inheritance. It is no mausoleum, no place of mere words. It is a leaven in our lives and in our world. It is still young, still growing, still dreaming. There is much work still to do, and we are the hands of that work; its brains. We are the sacred custodians of Europe of the coming times.