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Europe between Visions and Politics: Why Do We Need Perspectives?

Keynote Speech

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“Solidarity - key to solving social problems and supporting the evolution of Europe in future”.

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It is my great pleasure, as former Secretary General of the International Goethe Institut and later as State Secretary for Science and Arts in the Federal State of Hesse, as a convinced European citizen and citizen from Alsbach-Hähnlein, to share some thoughts and suggestions with you: concerning Europe between visions and daily politics as position paper at the beginning of an international meeting to which European citizens have come for issues of a European citizenship and its development showing solidarity. Thus, I am glad that you have travelled to our community and I would like to thank the organizers for the initiative and organization of this first project meeting, primarily the partnership association of Alsbach-Hähnlein with their President Hans Herrmann.

In the following, I would like to say some words concerning the range of topics between visions and practice of European politics. Yes, we do need visions in politics, when political planning for the future of Europe in a multilateral and global environment of worldwide political developments and relationships is concerned. Moreover, immediately the question comes up when for the last time such a vision had been presented. This was almost exactly four years ago on September 26, 2017, when the French State President, Emmanuel Macron, had made proposals for the renewal – more precisely: for a *new foundation* of the European Union at the Sorbonne in Paris – with the aim to react to multilateral, geopolitical shifting and to strengthen Europe in a sovereign, democratic way showing solidarity against nationalism, protectionism and tendencies towards isolation. To him it had been important to highlight the *unity in diversity* in its joint democratic basic values and giving better

emphasis in future to European politics with respect to economy but also to culture. Here, somebody had been talking in the sense of the approximately 65 years old tradition of important Europeans such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gasperi – and had strong reasons to ask for the political future of Europe: a Europe in which we should always make sure where we originally come from and where we wish to go to. What does Europe represent historically and politically and which kind of Europe do we wish to have in future? Which is its political position in the context of globalization? Are we citizens *of Europe* or „only“ citizens *of Euroland*? These are enough questions now in order to have a brief look on Europe’s historical and political development.

1. Europe – Where Do We Come From, Where Are We Right Now?

Already the name „Europe“ is ambiguous: Europe, the Phoenician princess had been kidnapped by the Greek Father of Gods, Zeus, in shape of a huge bull at today’s Lebanon bringing her to Crete. Again and again it had been the mythical source for artistic and literary representation up to modern age: thus, e.g. during the years of Cold War, Johannes Grützke, the painting artist from Berlin, had Europe balance on the bull on the Berlin Wall, as if it were during the Cold War between East and West or between Warsaw Pact and NATO. Artists and art as interpreters of history and politics. This implies a lot without any words, however, not everything.

Europe as Janus head, where both faces are not seldom looking away from each other and from time to time are even gazing to North America while the other face is scarcely looking in the direction of Russia and China, but also in the direction of Africa, which in the era of multilateralism and of globalization seems to be necessary, not only for economical reasons. Thus, more is at stake than single projects such as a Euro-Russian gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea or a new Silk Road from China to the West, but finally for Europe– as is shown by the migrations of our time – an active and European cooperation with respect to development in solidarity with African countries is at stake.

All these exemplary tasks and their accomplishment should be characterized by pragmatism in daily politics, however, above all by *a European Idea*. Less bureaucracy and centralism are needed in the European Community. As the discussion on again upcoming nationalism in countries of the EC shows, especially a discussion on values is needed for *a Society of*

European Citizens, because: we all are citizens of Europe with differing mentalities, histories, religions and cultures, but with liberal democratic values, subjected to a joint understanding, a building of communities and of solidarity – for a unit of variety. It is good that nowadays representatives of several European cities have come together at Alsbach in order to discuss just these issues and possibilities of a Society of European Citizens.

2. The European Idea: Society of Values and of Historical and Political Education

A European idea, based on the spirit of European intellectual and cultural history, especially on the enlightenment of the 18th century and its laws on humanity, tolerance and respect, in spite of all recent centrifugal endeavours, is of central importance in order to contribute to peace and understanding of peoples, freedom and democracy. This is the historical lesson learnt from World War II. Reminding of this are the liberty movements of the years ninety in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the communist Eastern Block, but also the replacement of dictatorships in Greece, Spain and Portugal in the years between 1960 and 1970. Especially in school lessons you should be reminded of these liberty movements, but where shall the enthusiasm for Europe come from when the curricula for the schools scarcely include „Europe“ and its historical and political development as integral element of education? At least in Germany lessons mainly focus on subjects of usefulness (STAM). For the up growing generation such a policy to remind during school lessons of the European history and of liberty *movements*, but also of *suppression* of liberty, makes a lot of sense, because it prepares for future developments.

3. Europe's Role in the Internal Relationship and in World Politics

If everything said up to now is valid in view of the so-called „European values“ within the community, the following thoughts shall turn to issues of the interior structure as well as to the role of Europe in world politics. This just has become important at present: more than 25 years after the collapse of the East Block not only in Middle Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe new states came into being, but also new attempts for self-government in European regions such as Basque Country, Scotland because of Brexit, and in Catalonia. They concern the respective relationship between centrality and decentrality in the strained conditions between the European Community and the individual member states, respectively their governments, but, at one level below also between single nations and

there between single regions. An issue already playing a role in the early times of European political formation, when central structures of the *United States of Europe* were concerned as federal system against a *Europe of Mother Countries* (Charles de Gaulle). This discussion is now strengthened again: thus differing *Europes* have been talked about in the plural, as well as about a Europe of differing speeds, about a division between the North and the South and last, but not least, out of political practice about a voting procedure within the European Community where the principle of unanimity should be replaced by a principle of majority.

It goes without saying that to these inner European discussions also concerning the relationship between the European Commission and the European Parliament, *external effects* add up, more precisely: the historically grown predominance of the executive against the legislative power,; these external effects were the protectionism of Donal Trump's "America First", softened since Joe Biden, but still effective today, and the new largely dimensioned rivalry for power and influence in this world and in space between the USA and the People's Republic of China. In view of such intensive shifting of world political coordinates we have to pay attention in Europe that we will not get between the large power blocks USA and People's Republic of China. Europe in this case plays the role of union, but the European Community must be more in future than the sum of single parts in its political planning and acting.

4. United in Diversity: Inside and Outside of Education and Culture

One element so far has been punishably neglected in the development towards the European Union. What is meant is the European task to have a look to the respective identities with their cultural, linguistic indicators and educational factors giving them support. Everywhere the most significant, occidental culture is talked about as the foundation of Europe, however, without having this followed by a commitment to cultural education as future task and providing for a sufficient budget item in the household of the European Community. European politics should concentrate on supporting the interest for politics respectively on reducing disenchantment with politics by culture political subjects and conceptions in the frame of overall European understanding as e.g. promoting youth exchange. Youth exchange has continuously diminished e.g. between France and Germany and as a matter of fact has never really developed in the direction of Middle Eastern

European countries. However, who believes that European friendship can do without knowing a second foreign language (Macron) and deems English sufficient as a basis for communication for all, is wrong, because via the language much more is conveyed than only the capability of understanding other people: via language you will automatically learn about history, culture, arts – as part of a diverse Europe.

In higher education the so-called Bologna process and the subsequent support of studies, research and education at universities in the European foreign countries was well intended, because the European Community by the Lisbon Strategy as of the year 2000 defined education as raw material in a *Europe otherwise poor in raw materials*, but the whole thing was organized in a very technocratic way. While it is true that in 1999 in Bologna 29 Secretaries of Education had pleaded in favour of mobility of students within Europe and had agreed upon the mutual acceptance of performance, examinations and degrees, the interest of young people to change to foreign universities has slacked down considerably. The reasons for this are complex, but granting award points was followed by a considerable schoolification of the originally free studies: the *contents* of the studies played a lesser role than the number of points to be reached. Therefore, it will be necessary to increase the exchange of young people within Europe again.

5. The European Union: Structure, Organization and Necessary Reforms

After the thoughts on the European Idea and the role of Europe in world politics now some observations on structure and organization of the European Community will follow which are of democratic interest to the Society of European Citizens. Not only Emmanuel Macron threw a critical view on the dominance of a Commission of the European Union over the European Parliament which had been established late in the history of the European Union: shall the executive also in future have predominance over the legislative in a *European House*, as Michail Gorbatschow once described his vision of a future Europe, and which House should this be? Which model do we need, if also (more) parliamentary control of an almost overpowering centralism of commission and red tapism is concerned which citizens also watch increasingly critical? The fact that it developed this way over the years comes from the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in the year 1951 as a useful network which in 1958 with the same member states Belgium, Federal Republic of Germany,

France, Italy, Luxemburg and Netherlands led to the European Economic Community (EEC) and in the following years up to 2013 was extended to 22 countries.

Due to the new entries the wheel rotated at too high speed, the increasing exterior crises in world politics and in world markets compounded the situation and partially had a centrifugal effect on many fields of European politics. In order to pause for a moment and to re-orient oneself, Emmanuel Macron analysed the question, if something like a Core Europe could exist to be derived from the Foundation States of the Coal and Steel Community respectively the EEC, or a *Two Speed Europe*. It goes without saying that this would impair the up to now principal equality of all Member States in the sense of a European Idea, however, would not have to be mandatory. Much rather the *principle of unanimity* should finally give way, which due to the growing number of members has become more and more paralyzing to a system of parliamentary building of majority as it is usual in democracies.

A further issue, namely the question of exit by one of the member states came up for the first time in case of Greek's financial problems, which was perhaps only postponed by a grant of billions by the European Community, until Brexit followed as actual exit after the British referendum. Also the question of sanctions vis-à-vis single member countries up to expulsion procedures because of disregarding European treaties and European political basic understandings has more recently come into focus as well as during almost weekly debates and should soon have to be regulated so that citizens do not show fatigue instead of the necessary enthusiasm.

If remarks concern some basic issues, also reforms should be done with respect to an over boarding executive: therefore, it had been courageous that Macron claimed several reforms: the European model is capable as no other model, but it should not continue like nowadays refusing the discussion on Europe and continuously re-nominating a 30 heads counting European Commission without considering if a 15 people head count could not also work well. Instead of the prevailing tendency that each country should be represented in the management of commissions, you should consider to concentrate responsibilities instead of splitting them up. Moreover, this would also correspond to the number of State Secretaries and the working practice in the respective cabinets in Europe.

6. Europe und Migration

For a long time and not only in view of the flow of refugees of the last six years the task has come up with respect to humanity and solidarity to set up a genuine migratory programme together with the corresponding laws in Europe. In this respect not only short time technical solutions are necessary, but also those which will have a sustainable effect according to European Laws on Asylum. An approach had been made by the Convention of Dublin of June 15, 1990, which should guarantee to each refugee coming from abroad an asylum procedure in the nominated member state. It had definitely been morally correct that Chancellor Merkel decided in August 2015 not to close the frontier between Austria and Germany, which was approached by many refugees on foot along the highway.

Since then six years have, however, gone by without the „European Solution“ mentioned by Chancellor Merkel again and again. The issues continue to exist; the steps taken up to now changed little and rather give the impression of standstill of constitutional action with respect to migration. Still, Italy, Greece and Spain have been left more or less alone with the issue of migration by the EC states north of the Alps, and had it not been for the „deal“ with Turkey which now will have to be renewed, the already precarious situation would have worsened considerably. Yes, this not yet solved issue has been leading increasingly to attacks by right wing people using racist and undemocratic wording, and is interfering with European solidarity. More than ever defined political concepts are needed with a recognizable time line: having said for a long time „we will manage!“ has not been sufficient any more, if this will not be supplemented by a constitutional “how”. This means a challenge to everybody.

Where do We Go to? - a Few Thoughts at the End

As long as European politics presently are interpreted as prevaillingly bureaucratic, technological and centralistic, nobody should be astonished if the national regional horizon comes closer again in thinking and feeling. All this has just not to do anything with well meant, but technocratic endeavours and conceptions of politics, but increasingly with emotional attitudes, which awake new nationalism and religiousness, and lets populists shout nationalistic slogans, because trust evidently seems to be diminishing. This had been the occasion for Emmanuel Macron and his ideas, visions and proposals. We will have to pay

attention to the values, which characterize a *Society of European Citizens*, a society not only shaped by economy and the Euro, but also by culture and education. Europe needs more than tackling with daily topical issues and their repair: it needs a vision beyond a useful economic community, understanding joint history in its diversity: in this way by recognizing diversity, a Society of European Citizens can emerge. In solidarity, for the future, in perpetuity.