

United Nations Secretary-General

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Address at the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen for the Unity of Europe

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Su Majestad, Señoras y Señores,

En primer lugar, quiero dar las gracias a Su Majestad el Rey Felipe VI de España por su presencia aquí hoy y sus amables palabras; significan mucho para mí.

No hay mejor manifestación del destino compartido por España y Portugal que el hecho de ser ambos miembros de la Unión Europea

Nuestros destinos han discurrido por sendas paralelas y se han cruzado en altamar.

En los años setenta, España y Portugal adoptaron los valores democráticos y pluralistas de Europa y se sumaron juntos a la Comunidad Económica Europea.

Lo que fue una rivalidad entre hermanos se ha convertido desde entonces en una asociación duradera, que beneficia a Europa en su conjunto.”

Meine sehr verehrten Damen und Herren,

Den Karlspreis 2019 zu erhalten, ist eine einzigartige Ehre.

Ich bin der Stadt Aachen, die unsere europäische Geschichte und unser europäisches Erbe symbolisiert, sehr dankbar für diese Auszeichnung.

Dankeschön.

As a committed European and Secretary General of the United Nations, this prize is especially meaningful to me.

But I know that you are paying through me tribute to the commitment, service and sacrifice of the women and men of the United Nations.

By also encouraging the consolidation of the two greatest peace projects of our times - the United Nations and the European Union, your society showed great foresight.

At this crossroad of our history, your encouragement humbles me.

I know that those ambitious projects, the European Union and the United Nations, have yielded unprecedented benefits for our peoples.

Yes, We The Peoples, as the UN Charter designates itself, undeniably lifted millions out of poverty and forged peace in troubled lands.

And yes, peoples of the European Union - the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize - are an indispensable part of it.

The European Union has developed an exemplary partnership with the United Nations.

But I would be blindsided not to acknowledge some setbacks, let alone a sweeping anxiety.

This should probe our European conscience, reflected in its distinctive approach to science, freedom and history.

After all, both the United Nations and the European Union are a legacy of the values of the Enlightenment, in my opinion, the most important European contribution to World Civilization.

Those values have shaped my entire life, and my political views.

I graduated as an engineer in Lisbon, and I hold dear that science is fertile ground for the ideal of advancement and progress, even if, in some moments, running the risk of distancing mankind from nature.

Having grown up under Salazar's dictatorship, I came of age politically witnessing the true value of freedom.

As former UN High Commissioner for Refugees for 10 years, I saw the scars of displacement and uprooting.

And History has consolidated my firm belief that those tragedies can only be avoided by prevention of conflicts and development through international cooperation.

Politicians should always heed philosophers.

It took two world conflicts at the heart of Europe to put the words of Immanuel Kant into acts.

Enjoyment of freedom and human rights could only be preserved in an international rules-based order on the long journey to "Ewigen Frieden" .

Soon, the Rome Treaty followed suit on the Charter of the United Nations to bind European countries and peoples.

Europe was the name of a crisis.

It became at long last a construction.

And it was so inspiring for a young Portuguese engineer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

An engineer plans. Fate laughs.

I am standing here as a European Secretary General of the United Nations.

And never the post-world war institutions and their underlying values have been so eroded and put to the test.

The hard truth is we collectively have taken too many things for granted.

History takes its revenge on those that prophesized its end.

Conflicts have become more complex – and interlinked – than ever before.

They produce horrific violations of international humanitarian law and human rights abuses. And we are witnessing that the Human Rights agenda has been losing ground to the national sovereignty agenda a little bit everywhere.

People have been forced to flee their homes on a scale unseen in decades. And with several shelters with closed doors, namely in Europe.

Democratic principles are under siege, and the rule of law is being undermined. Inequalities are on the rise.

Hate speech, racism and xenophobia are fueling terrorism through social media.

Our generation could even be facing the moral implications of an autonomous weapon system that could by themselves target and attack human beings. That is why I have been strongly advocating for their ban.

All this represents several ways of putting question the values of the Enlightenment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this time of great anxiety and geopolitical disorder, three unprecedented challenges knock on our doors: climate change, demography and migration, and the digital era.

This compounds the risks of confrontation.

And multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most, and when it has never been so fit to address those challenges.

In these difficult times, the words of Albert Camus in 1946 resonate in my mind:

“ (···) Nous ne pouvons pas échapper à l’ histoire, puisque nous y sommes plongés jusqu’ au cou. Mais on peut prétendre à lutter dans l’ histoire pour préserver cette part de l’ homme qui ne lui appartient pas.”

As Secretary General of the United Nations now, I never felt so clearly the need of a strong and united Europe and this is my main message to you.

If you want to avoid a new Cold War, if you want to avoid the confrontation of two blocks, probably with a slightly different composition than in the past, if you want to build a true multilateral order, we absolutely need a united and strong Europe as the fundamental pillar of a multilateral order based on the rule of law.

The failure of Europe would inevitably be the failure of multilateralism and the failure of a world in which the rule of law can prevail.

Allow me to further elaborate why, but also what Europe represents for the United Nations.

First, as I have already said in Paris, Europe is “too meaningful to fail.”

It is a pioneer but also an advance post of multilateralism and the rule of law.

The European Union is a unique experiment in shared sovereignty.

When I was a member of the European Council, I always felt that its best asset was its ability to compromise in times of growing interconnectedness.

The primacy of European law, as developed by the European Court of Justice, singles out the European Union in the world order.

As such, it is a bulwark against indifference to international law, which is a poison for multilateralism.

Second, the European social model is still a reminder that economic performance must serve overall social wellbeing and a more equal society.

I myself tried to build on those diverse Europeans traditions by leading the process that set up the “Lisbon agenda” in 2000.

I always felt that social affairs should move up the European agenda.

And today it is true more than ever.

Social safety nets and solidarity are the most efficient ways to tackle global issues we are facing such as climate change, migration and new technologies.

Third, this solidarity should embrace a universal approach.

Mindful of the memory of colonization, and looking for a new spirit of partnership, I co-chaired in 2000 the first Africa - European Union and India - European Union Summits.

And European countries have a key role in boosting the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Let me be clear that it is a historical responsibility for Europeans to always remember what multilateralism means for those in need the support of the support of Europe.

And as much as we will deliver on the promise to leave no one behind, people will be able to live decently from their work in their countries.

It is the only way for migrations to be sustainable, and safe, not irregular and inhumane, out of option and not necessity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are transitioning to a new world order, with destination yet unknown.

That is why our world seems at present chaotic.

But even if we end up with a multipolar world, it is not in itself a guarantee of mutual peace and security.

Europe can look back to its history before the First World War.

Without a multilateral system at that time, a multipolar Europe failed to prevent the outbreak of two deadly conflicts.

For so many reasons, and perhaps a touch of “saudade” , I wish Europe could stand up more decisively for the multilateral agenda.

The United Nations need a strong and united Europe.

For this to happen, Europe will need to come to grips with some serious challenges.

I do think that what weakens the European project has a lot to do with a lack of ownership by the peoples of Europe.

And I saw very encouraging signals of this changing in the past European elections and the increase in the number of voters.

A lively and permanent interflow of communication between civil society and political institutions as recommended by Juergen Habermas has too often been substituted with a disembodied expert or rules-based decision-making process.

This has further been compounded by growing inequalities betraying one of the founding values of the European Union, especially the principle of solidarity recognized in the Charter of Fundamental rights.

This is the moment in which we need to restore trust. Trust between people and political establishments. Trust between people and the institutions. Trust between people and international organizations.

Last month, I celebrated in Geneva 100 years of the International Labor Organization.

Its constitution states that “lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice.”

And I cannot help thinking about the young Europeans.

It heartens me that Aachen honors them with a Prize alongside this reception.

Their generation is our best hope.

Europe cannot fail it.

61% of those below 25 years of age hold dear the European Project.

And I believe that European projects like Erasmus and the Youth Guarantee Program greatly contributed to this.

But let’ s not forget that their unemployment rate still averages 15.6% in 2018, from 25% in 2013.

It is very important that our young people strongly believe Europe is also working for them.

Ladies, and Gentlemen,

Populist, ethnic, religious and nationalist passions resurface in the world, including in Europe.

Challenges are growing outward.

But many people are turning inward, mired in the memory of a golden age that probably never was.

But Europe will not protect its rich heritage if it loses interest in what comes ahead.

And there is no alternative but to address global challenges on a European scale. No country can do it alone.

As such it is an opportunity to define what the Europeans want, which is in fact who they are.

First: climate change is the defining issue of our time.

It is not a coincidence that two decisive moments in our collective action against climate change took place in two European Union Member States, in Paris and recently Katowice.

The European Union must lead the way.

Not only it is the right decision; it is also a smart investment.

But scientific experts tell us that the clock is ticking.

We are losing that race.

They also tell us that it is still possible to limit global warming to 1.5° C at the end of the century, if we take decisive action.

I just visited the Pacific Islands some weeks ago.

For people living on those islands, climate change is not an academic discussion about the future.

It is a matter of life and death today.

And we need more ambition to avoid this disaster and Europe must set the pace.

I wholeheartedly welcomed Chancellor Merkel' s pledge to make Germany carbon neutral by 2050.

It paves the way for an ambitious EU contribution to my Climate Summit in September.

The objectives that summit are very clear:

We need more ambition in mitigation.

We need more ambition in adaptation.

We need more ambition in finance.

And we need to be clear when talk to the people about climate change. We need to make people understand that our objective to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 is possible but i requires transformative policies and measures in the way we produce energy, in the way we feed our population, in the way we build and manage our cities, and in the way we make progress in industry.

It is also necessary to be clear. That is why I have been so strongly advocating that we need to progressively shift taxation from the income and salaries to carbon. It is much better to tax pollution than jobs.

I have been advocating for the end of subsidies to fossil fuels. Does it make any sense that our money, as tax payers, is used to boost hurricanes, to spread drought, to bleach corals, to melt glaciers, to diminish biodiversity and to progressively destroy the world.

I would like to quote a not very popular sentence in Europe: “As tax payers, we want our money back instead of seeing it used to destroy the world.”

Second: the impact of new technologies.

European citizens are protected by the most consequential regulatory framework on protection of data privacy.

The EU General Data Protection Regulation will influence legal standards worldwide and support the rights of the person in the virtual world.

This is a testament to how a united Europe shapes the digital era and leads in the protection of human rights.

I also welcome the Christchurch Call to thwart the spread of extremist content online.

Technological developments including artificial intelligence can be a major ally in the implementation of our 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with an enormous potential for the generation of wealth and well-being around the world.

But they are also risks and serious dangers.

My High-Level Panel on digital cooperation will deliver its conclusions in June as a contribution to make digital technologies a force for good.

And I encourage further European efforts and unity in this regard.

Again, I believe that Europe is particularly well placed looking at the potential impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and, mainly, artificial intelligence.

It is clear that there will be massive disruptions in the labour markets. Millions of jobs will be created, millions of jobs will disappear, but they will not be the same and they will require different sets of skills.

So it is obvious that our education systems will need to be transformed in a way that what matters is to learn how to learn much more than to learn lots of things. It is clear that life-long learning will be the center of education and training systems.

We will probably need a new generation of social safety nets in order to cope with huge social challenges that will appear. But if you look at the world today, the European social model is best foundation to be able to respond to these challenges and Europe has an absolutely unique role to play in creating the conditions to transform these areas in a positive manner.

Third: European culture has been enriched throughout its history by diversity.

This Charlemagne Palace borrowed several elements of Roman and Byzantine civilization.

Assimilating several culture and legacies was the starting point of European culture.

Of course, Europe must hold true its values enshrined in the Charter of fundamental human rights and in the European Convention on Human rights.

But Europe cannot be premised on “us” versus “them” .

Scapegoating migrants and closing our doors to asylum seekers does not protect but shame this heritage.

I want to salute the presence of the Bishop of Aachen, whose fantastic words we heard during the mass, to ask him to convey to his Holiness the Pope my deep appreciation for the permanent strength of his voice in defence of migrants and refugees.

It is too often forgotten that the 1951 Refugee Convention was initially adopted to protect millions of displaced Europeans in the post-war period.

And I do believe that Europe has a responsibility to live up to those commitments.

It is only by being united that Europe will propose a balanced approach addressing the root causes of migration while preserving the rights and dignity of migrants.

All societies tend to be, or are already, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious.

This must be considered as a richness not as a threat.

Let's not take things for granted. For diversity to enrich societies, there must be strong political, economic, social and cultural investments in cohesion.

For each community to feel its identity respected and that they belong to the society as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History tells that inability to write was Charlemagne's frustration of a lifetime.

In his old age, the "Father of Europe" would practice in his bed during his free time the formation of letters on books and wax tablets he hid under his pillow.

Some have said that like Charlemagne, Europe had to learn from Jerusalem, Athens, Rome and so many other cultures.

And at this moment I cannot but remember all those refugee children that I saw determined to keep learning in UNHCR or UNWRA schools.

They were the same faces lit up in the poor neighborhoods of Lisbon when I was working there as a student volunteer. The work that led me to assume a political vocation.

All of them, and those yearning to learn, are a part of this “honorable choice” described by Albert Camus in the same text of 1946, “Vers le Dialogue” :

“ Tenir obstinément ce formidable pari qui décidera enfin si les paroles sont plus fortes que les balles.”

Como Secretário-Geral das Nações Unidas, não tenho outros poderes senão a persuasão e o apelo à razão.

Posso assegurar-vos que darei sempre o meu melhor na defesa apaixonada dos valores do pluralismo, da tolerância, do diálogo e do respeito mútuo para construir um mundo de paz, justiça e dignidade humana.

Obrigado.

<https://www.un.org/pt/content/pt/speeches/2019-05-30/address-international-charlemagne-prize-of-aachen-for-unity-of-europe>