



European Council

The President

040846/EU XXV. GP
Eingelangt am 07/10/14

PRESS

EN

SPEECH

EUCO 176/14

PRESSE 463

PR PCE 152

Antwerpen, 7 September 2014

**Speech by the President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
at the Community of Sant'Egidio conference
"Peace is the Future"**

Belonging to the European Union means first and foremost adhering to fundamental values. Values like human rights, peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, responsibility, solidarity and friendship. Yes, I did say "friendship" – and I realize that some of you may be surprised to hear such a word used in the context of politics.

But let us remember that the first Franco-German post-war treaty was called "Treaty of Friendship". It's all about: love, friendship, tolerance, forgiveness and peace. And it seems to me that the word "peace" – the value of "peace" – is what best captures the very essence of the European project on which we have been toiling since the end of World War II.

After all, establishing, maintaining and developing peace is an ongoing battle. A battle which we must fight on a daily basis.

President Mitterrand's saying is still true: "*Le nationalisme c'est la guerre*". When he spoke about extreme nationalism, when the nation's glory is put above all else, he said it means war. We have to keep this in mind today, looking at the aggression and the death toll in Ukraine.

As the Holy Father, Pope Francis, said in June this year, welcoming Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas at the Vatican, and I quote :

"Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict; yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity".

It is even more true now than before this tragic summer, with atrocities like the downing of a passenger plane or barbarianism in Iraq and Syria.

Courage, strength, tenacity: they are the European Union's very *raison d'être*. For if there is one value which has enabled the European Union to endure, it is that of peace.

After more than 1500 years of fratricidal wars, an almost endless list of successively broken peace treaties and the destruction of Europe, the death of ten of millions of men and women in two world wars, it was through forgiveness, reconciliation and cooperation among and between the peoples of Europe that Europe's rebirth was made possible.

Robert Schuman symbolically led us into this European renaissance on 9 May 1950. Speaking several months before this declaration, Robert Schuman stated quite clearly that *"trust between peoples is neither improvised nor imposed [...]. We can only attain it through cooperation within a broader framework in which a number of us show our goodwill. That framework is Europe."* Because Europe is in fact a generous concept. It is the practical implementation of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This peace cannot be merely a word. This peace can only be established on the basis of trust (*"confiance"* in French, from *"se fier à"* meaning "to have faith in"), which derives, in Europe as elsewhere, from reconciliation.

Reconciliation, which draws on forgiveness, a theological concept which the Founding Fathers of the European project brought to the political sphere. And we have achieved reconciliation after wars of an unprecedented cruelty. Forgiving came like a conversion after a Calvary. Reconciliation is therefore at the root of European "togetherness", to use that excellent English word.

It implies also that we have made peace with ourselves, for there is no external peace without achieving internal peace. Reconciliation that does not result from forgetting, because nothing lasting is ever constructed on denial of the past.

To be reconciled is to accept the past. Not in order to understand it or to excuse it, but to go beyond it. That is the only way to establish a lasting peace. Reconciliation is underway in the Western Balkans. The normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo was a precondition for Serbia candidacy for EU-membership. Two years ago, remember, we were together in Sarajevo, also for a Sant' Egidio gathering.

If it is to be lasting, peace must also be solidly based. For you cannot "force" peace, and too many failures are caused by a lack of understanding of the original premises. We cannot have permanent peace if we do not live in peace – if we do not eliminate the violence in ourselves.

For this reason, we must establish permanent bonds of peace beginning with our own free will, without deceiving ourselves or others, by showing acts of respect every day, acts of justice and love towards others and towards ourselves. Acts of respect which are just as much acts of peace. We have to bring people together. People who have met each other, got to know each other, start to respect each other.

Levinas was right when he spoke about *"le visage de l'autre"* and the ethical appeal coming from this encounter. The millions of young people that come together through Erasmus: they will never become euro-sceptics. To develop, peace must be able to count on a profound sense of common destiny and on shared values. And that is where the Union must play its part in full.

For if peace is in itself a value, a value of which the ultimate prolongation is love, our Union is not in itself a value (in the sense of an end to be attained). It is only a means, and a very effective one, serving the values of which it is the guarantee and which at the same time go beyond it.

Still today, the Union never ceases to grow. It does so without spilling a single drop of blood. We started with six and now we are with twenty-eight and the story is not over. There is a waiting list. Remember the European flags on Maidan in the winter of this year.

An evidence of this "new Europe" is the election of the Polish Premier as President of the European Council, twenty-five years after the fall of the Berlin wall. And the "new members" attribute to the value of peace in the Union an importance which goes beyond that attributed to it by the "old members", who have sadly somewhat forgotten the lessons of the past...

For the "new members" the Cold War only ended in 1989, and for the people of the Western Balkans civil war and genocide are still, sadly, living memories. But '*Opus justitiae pax*'. Our societies are now faced with rising poverty, unemployment and growing inequalities. This sentiment paves the way to populism, extremism and anti-European feelings. Europe is considered by many as not sufficiently 'caring and protecting' for all the Europeans.

We need to get the balance right. It is essential for the Union to be also on the protecting side; it is urgent for the Union not to be seen as only benefiting businesses, but also employees; not only the "movers" - those who travel and are in contact with people of other countries, but also the "stayers" (at home). Justice is at the heart of our political and societal debates. For injustice is a threat to a harmonious society. It creates antagonism, hate, enemy-thinking, racism. Which is why we so very much need more economic growth and a fairer distribution of income. I know from experience that there are no miracle solutions, but I also know how big the challenge is and what the consequences are if we fail. This is all the more true on a global scale. Poverty and extreme poverty have gone down in China, India, South America but is still too high, there and elsewhere. Poverty is also, but not only, at the root of extremism. Extremists, also called religious extremists, exploit this despair and lack of hope. But often they are just criminals and even worse. But the victims are real religious people who want to live in peace and lead a normal life. By the way, the EU is externally a caring Union, a real 'soft' power.

Europe is not perfect but we are the provider of half of the development aid in the world, the biggest donor of humanitarian aid.

But when civilisation itself is at stake as in Iraq today, we must act also militarily. We will not hesitate to take all necessary steps as was said in the NATO Summit a few days ago. This is not a fight of the West against Islam. It is a fight of civilisation against barbarism.

The European Union is the driving idea of the possibility and necessity of solidarity between persons and between peoples, based on the responsibility of each towards themselves and towards what Christians call their "neighbour", and that others, Christians sometimes too, call their "brother" or simply the travelling stranger...

Responsibility and solidarity go hand in hand with rights and duties towards others. I would like this to be remembered by all those who advocate a withdrawal, those whose heightened selfishness test the Europe to the limit. This selfishness is expressed not only in declining to help others in difficult times but also in refusing to accept our own responsibilities towards others.

Living in peace means living with others in solidarity and with responsibility. We felt, during the crisis in the eurozone this interdependence. We are all in the same boat if we want to survive.

To conclude, let us hope that in future, in the Union, we may continue to say, to paraphrase Aristide Briand, French Minister in the twenties and Nobel-Price winner:

"I say that Europe is not diminished, nor is it compromised in its strength when, free of all imperialist designs and serving only ideas of progress and humanity, it stands up and declares directly to the world's face: I declare peace on you."