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**Timothy Garton Ash: *Europe, Europes*
International Charlemagne Prize 2017 Acceptance Speech**

Sehr verehrter Herr Bundespräsident, sehr verehrter Herr Oberbürgermeister, sehr verehrter Dr. Linden, meine sehr geehrten Damen und Herren!

I am deeply honoured to receive this year's International Charlemagne prize and I accept this honour as an English European. These days, some people are a little surprised by that combination of adjective and noun: English European. Yet after all, one of the Emperor Charlemagne's chief intellectual advisers was an Anglo-Saxon, Alcuin of York. My university, Oxford, has been a European university for nine centuries. A history of Europe which did not mention all the separate and combined contributions of the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish, of Shakespeare, Adam Smith, Winston Churchill and George Orwell, would be like a symphony orchestra without a string section. (Or is it rather the brass?). As I observed on the day after the Brexit vote, Britain can no more leave Europe than Piccadilly Circus can leave London.

Yet everyone comes to a conscious self-identification as a European by his or her own individual route. I became a passionate European through my intense, unforgettable personal experience of living in a divided Germany, witnessing the emergence of the Solidarity movement in Poland, and sharing the struggle for freedom in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest and Berlin with great central European recipients of this prize such as Václav Havel, Bronislaw Geremek and György Konrád. In those inspiring times, the causes of freedom and Europe marched together, arm in arm: freedom meant Europe, Europe meant freedom.

I hardly need to add that not all my compatriots identify themselves quite so happily as Europeans. Rereading the acceptance speech of the last British recipient of this prize, Tony Blair, I could not resist a wry smile when I came to his central message: 'Britain must overcome its ambivalence about Europe'. But this ambivalence is no longer only a British speciality - the political equivalent, as it were, of fish and chips. 'British' Eurosceptic views, and nationalist populism, are now to be found in all corners of the continent.

Nor has Britain's own ambivalence somehow magically disappeared with the Brexit vote. In fact, I have never in my life seen so much passionate pro-Europeanism in Britain as there is today, especially in Scotland, in London, and among the young. A significant proportion of the 48% who voted for Britain to stay in the European Union are still unreconciled to the result. It turns out that EU membership is a bit like good health: you know how much you should value it only when you are losing it. But rest assured, we British Europeans have not given up.

This leads me to an important question about the individual and the collective. The idea of a formal, legal kind of individual EU citizenship for post-Brexit British Europeans is surely unrealistic, but a political community that defines its members only by virtue of their belonging to a member state, and which, even in its intellectual and political debates, is constantly asking after your passport, is missing something. If

we are to deepen our European sense of community, we must learn to see each other, to recognise each other, as individual Europeans.

For a European historian it's a very special experience to speak in this historic coronation chamber, a few metres from the church Charlemagne built more than 1200 years ago. To be in this place is to be summoned to think in historical time. Politics and history have different clocks. A British prime minister once memorably observed that 'a week in politics is a long time'. History's clock, by contrast, is marked in centuries. Now one way of reading European history across the centuries is as a constant oscillation between periods of European order, however hegemonic and unjust those orders might be, and periods of usually violent disorder. In this perspective, our age is quite exceptional.

For 72 years since the end of the Second World War we have not seen a major interstate war in Europe. I can find no comparable 72 year period in the last ten centuries. It is important to say at once that there have been very terrible wars in Europe since 1945, from the Greek civil war through the bloody wars in former Yugoslavia, all the way to the low-level armed conflict still being stirred by Vladimir Putin in eastern Ukraine. But there have been no major wars. That is the more remarkable because this period includes a tectonic shift from one order to another: the end of the Soviet empire and the cold war in the years 1989 to 1991. In the past, such a tectonic shift would have been accompanied by war. Never before have so many European countries been liberal democracies, most of them gathered together in the same political, economic and security communities. To adapt Winston Churchill's famous remark about democracy: this is the worst possible Europe, apart from all the other Europes that have been tried from time to time.

Yet the historian may look at this 72 year span and say: 'well, you're overdue for a big crisis.' And sure enough, the many crises exercising different parts of Europe combine to form an existential crisis of the whole European project as it has developed since 1945.

Here the historian and the politician, indeed intellectuals and politicians more broadly, have necessarily different roles. My job can be stated very simply: it is to seek the truth, to find the truth, insofar as critically tested evidence and rational argument allow, and then to state that truth as carefully, plainly and vividly as possible. So I'm doing my job if I try to identify the causes of this existential crisis and point to the vulnerabilities that nationalist populists exploit. For example: a directly elected European Parliament actually exercises considerable democratic control over European laws and policies, but most Europeans don't *feel* that they are directly represented and their voice heard in Brussels. Many European societies have great difficulty accepting the scale and speed of immigration, not least that facilitated by dismantling the internal frontiers in Europe while not adequately securing the external borders of the Schengen area. And I trust the Charlemagne prizewinner for 2002 – the Euro – will not feel personally offended if I note that the Eurozone, intended to advance European unity, has in recent years fostered painful divisions between northern and southern Europe. These are perhaps uncomfortable truths, but I think the ghost of Alcuin of York would agree that it is the scholar's job to speak them.

The politician, by contrast, has always to start from where we are, always to watch his or her words, and to convey a sense of 'yes, we can' – roughly translatable into German as 'wir schaffen das'. The intellectual must spell out the truth that no empire, commonwealth, alliance or community on earth has ever lasted forever, so this one won't either. The politician must work to ensure that our unprecedented, voluntary, peaceful European empire-by-consent will last as long as humanly possible.

Yet if you are, as I am, a *spectateur engagé*, you can also contribute to that political enterprise simply by bringing home the historical truth. I would argue that for three generations after 1945, the most important single motor of European integration was individual, personal memories of war, occupation, Holocaust and Gulag, of dictatorships – fascist or communist –, and extremes of nationalism, discrimination and poverty. Now, for the first time, we have a whole generation of Europeans most of whom – not all, but most – have grown up since 1989 with none of those traumatic and formative experiences. They have known only a Europe largely whole and mainly free. Almost inevitably, they incline to take it for granted; for there is a universal human tendency to perceive what you grow up with and see around you as in some sense normal, even natural. Czeslaw Milosz describes this phenomenon memorably in his book *The Captive Mind*, comparing us to Charlie Chaplin in the film *The Gold Rush*, bustling around cheerfully in a wooden shack hanging perilously over the edge of a cliff.

I hope we're not that far gone but we do need somehow to convey to this generation that what they today take to be normal is in fact, in historical perspective, profoundly abnormal – exceptional, extraordinary. In his speech last year, Pope Francis mentioned Elie Wiesel's call for a 'memory transfusion' to younger Europeans. Exactly so. Of course nothing can compare with the impact of direct, personal experience. Yet one purpose of studying history is precisely to learn from other people's experiences without having to go through them yourself. Among the encouraging signs in recent months is a new mobilisation among this post-1989 generation of Europeans, who are showing that their pulse does beat faster for Europe.

Another, more general lesson from history is that what were originally just means to an end can come with time to be treated as ends in themselves. (Anyone who has ever tried to abolish a committee in a university, or any other institution, will know what I mean.) In his opening speech to the original Congress of Europe in The Hague in May 1948, the man who would subsequently be the first recipient of this prize, Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, said: 'let us never forget, my friends, that European Union is a means and no end'. This from a high priest of European unification, at a time when European Union was still only a dream. His warning is very relevant today. All the European institutions we have created are means to higher ends, not ends in themselves. At every turn, we should ask 'is this institution or instrument still fit for purpose, the best available for that purpose?' It is no use just parroting 'more Europe, more Europe'. The right answer will often be that we need more of this but less of that. Only an organisation capable of redistributing power both downward and upward, as changing needs require, will be seen by its citizens as alive and responsive.

And then there is the dichotomy most characteristic of European history: that of unity and diversity. Here in Aachen, we inevitably think of the Holy Roman Empire,

Europe's longest lasting empire. The historian Peter Wilson argues that one reason the Holy Roman Empire did survive so long is that its overarching structures were seen as securing and protecting the enormous diversity of political, ecclesiastical and legal communities under its aegis, not threatening them with excessive centralisation and homogenisation. Its legitimacy and longevity derived from its ability to live with this complexity, and hence with a level of chronic discord: 'although outwardly stressing unity and harmony, the Empire in fact functioned by accepting disagreement and disgruntlement as permanent elements of its internal politics'. I think there's a lesson there for the European Union.

Our contemporary European diversity is not just of states and histories, but also of cultures and the languages in which they are embedded. These profound differences of culture, language and philosophical traditions also cut deep into the way we think about the state, law and politics, and therefore about the political order to be constructed between our states and peoples.

Europe will be stronger if it can accommodate all these kinds of diversity. Medical science identifies two contrasting problems with joints: hypermobility, meaning the joint is too loose, and hypomobility, meaning the joint is stuck tight. Europe will be weakened if its structures become too loose, but also if they are too rigid. Like an Olympic athlete, Europe needs to be both strong and flexible: strong because it is flexible, flexible because it is strong.

By now you will have realised that I have been leading you in a kind of rapid motion Blue Danube waltz through a series of dichotomies: the individual and the collective, historical time and political time, the intellectual and the politician, means and ends, national and European, realism and idealism, and, last but not least, complexity and simplicity. For at the end of the day, what we want is really quite simple: it is for people in Europe to enjoy freedom, peace, dignity, the rule of law, adequate prosperity and social security. It's how we achieve those simple goals that is so necessarily complicated.

[Following paragraphs delivered in German – English translation below]

Lassen Sie mich zum Schluss ein paar Worte an Deutschland und die Deutschen richten.

Als ich zum ersten Mal nach Deutschland kam, Anfang der Siebzigerjahre, waren die Schatten des Zweiten Weltkriegs und der nationalsozialistischen Diktatur noch allgegenwärtig. (Mein erstes Forschungsthema war Berlin im Dritten Reich.) Das Land war schmerzlich geteilt, und ich erlebte aus nächster Nähe jene zweite deutsche Diktatur, welche die ganze Welt heute mit einem hässlichen Kurzwort assoziiert: Stasi.

Dann kam das *annus mirabilis* 1989, und Deutschland erhielt völlig unerwartet seine „zweite Chance“, um Fritz Sterns zu Recht berühmte Formulierung aufzugreifen. Über mehr als ein Vierteljahrhundert habe ich seitdem mit wachsender Bewunderung beobachtet, wie gut das vereinigte Deutschland diese zweite Chance genutzt hat. Ich persönlich finde es unglaublich bewegend, dass sich heute Flüchtlinge aus aller Welt nach Deutschland sehnen, als wäre es das Gelobte Land. Es ist doch wunderbar, dass

Deutschland heute wie eine Insel der Stabilität, der Besonnenheit und der Liberalität aus einem Ozean des nationalistischen Populismus herausragt. Wenn ich diese historische Wende vom Dunkel zum Licht betrachte, erfüllt mich das jedes Mal mit echter und großer Freude.

Aber – es gibt immer ein „Aber“ – die zweite Chance, genauer gesagt: die zweite Hälfte der zweiten Chance, liegt noch immer vor Ihnen – nämlich die gesamteuropäische Hälfte. Mit einem neuen, entschieden proeuropäischen französischen Präsidenten ergibt sich für Deutschland und Frankreich erneut die Gelegenheit, wie schon so oft zuvor in der Geschichte der europäischen Integration, gemeinsam voranzugehen. Diese zweite Hälfte der zweiten Chance wird aber nicht leicht sein. Deutschland steht noch immer vor dem alten Problem der „kritischen Größenordnung“ – zu klein, aber doch zu groß; zu groß, aber doch zu klein. Kluge Führung in Europa bedarf der ausgeprägten Fähigkeit, Europa immer auch mit den Augen der anderen Europäer zu sehen, sie braucht Einfühlungsvermögen. Sie braucht auch Gelassenheit, Zuversicht und Mut.

Bundespräsident Frank-Walter Steinmeier hat das Wort „Mut“ zum Schlüsselbegriff seiner Antrittsrede gemacht. Dazu gehört der „Mut zur Wahrheit“, von dem Präsident Emmanuel Macron sehr eindrucksvoll gesprochen hat. Dazu gehört aber auch der Mut zum Kompromiss. Der Mut, mit Ungewissheit, Unvollkommenheit, ja sogar Unverbindlichkeit zu leben – so wie im Heiligen Römischen Reich. Kurzum: das Leben ist kein Gesamtkonzept! Das gilt erst recht für das politische Leben Europas.

In seiner Studie zur Geschichte Berlins schrieb Karl Scheffler vor hundert Jahren, die Stadt sei „dazu verdammt, immerfort zu werden und niemals zu sein“. Das Gleiche könnte man von Europa sagen. Es wird nie jener hehre Augenblick kommen, in dem man ausrufen kann: „Da ist es, das fertige Europa! La belle finalité européenne – verweile doch, Du bist so schön!“

Nein, auch Europa ist dazu verdammt, immerfort zu werden und niemals zu sein. Aber das muss nicht unbedingt ein Fluch, es kann auch ein Segen sein. Wenn man etwas älter ist, sieht man, dass die Jahre des Werdens oft die schönsten Jahre des Lebens sind. So hat das ewig unfertige Europa die Chance, immer jung zu bleiben. Gestalten wir es also gemeinsam: das niemals endende Werden Europas.

[English translation of the concluding passage delivered in German]

Let me in conclusion say a few words to Germany and the Germans.

When I first came to Germany, in the early 1970s, the shadows of the Second World War and Nazi dictatorship were still omnipresent. (My first research project was on Berlin in the Third Reich.) The country was still painfully divided, and I experienced at first hand that second German dictatorship which the whole world now knows by one short ugly word: Stasi.

Then came the year of wonders 1989, and Germany received, quite unexpectedly, what the historian Fritz Stern famously called its 'second chance'. For more than a quarter-century now I have watched with growing admiration how well united Germany has used this second chance. I personally find it extremely moving that

refugees from all over the world now look towards Germany, as if it were the Promised Land. It is rather wonderful that Germany now stands like an island of stability, moderation and liberality in the midst of an ocean of nationalist populism. Every time I contemplate this historical turning from darkness to light, it fills me with real delight.

But – there's always a 'but' – the second chance, or to be more precise the second half of the second chance, is still before you – the all-European half. With a new, decidedly pro-European French president, Germany and France once again have the chance to go ahead together, as so often before in the history of European integration. This second half of the second chance will, however, not be easy. Germany still faces the old, familiar problem of its 'critical size' – too small and yet too large; too large and yet too small. Wise leadership in Europe requires a highly developed ability to see Europe also through other Europeans' eyes – it needs *Einfühlungsvermögen*. It also requires steadiness, confidence and courage.

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier made 'courage' the central keyword of his inaugural address. That must include the 'courage to speak the truth' of which president Emmanuel Macron has spoken so powerfully. But it also includes the courage to compromise. The courage to live with uncertainty, incompleteness, even ambiguity – as in the Holy Roman Empire. In short: life is not a *Gesamtkonzept*. And that's especially true of the political life of Europe.

In a book on the history of Berlin published more than 100 years ago, Karl Scheffler wrote that Berlin is 'fated always to be becoming and never to be'. One could say something similar about Europe. We will never arrive at that sublime moment when we can cry: 'there it is, the finished Europe! *La belle finalité européenne - Verweile doch, Du bist so schön!*'

No, Europe too is fated always to be becoming and never to be. But that need not necessarily be a curse, it can even be a blessing. When you're somewhat older you realise that the years of becoming are often the best years of one's life. Thus our ancient Europe has a chance to remain forever young. Let us then shape it together – Europe's never ending becoming.
