



VERLEIHUNG DES  
INTERNATIONALEN KARLSPREISES  
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ANSPRACHE  
VON  
PROFESSOR DR. HORST KÖHLER  
BUNDESPRÄSIDENT

(Englische Fassung)

ES GILT DAS GESPROCHENE WORT!

Translation of advance text

President Ciampi,  
Your Majesty,  
Mr Mayor,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I.

Three years ago, President Ciampi, you yourself gave the citation for the recipient of the International Charlemagne Prize. You spoke about money. For the euro, our single European currency, received this Prize in 2002. There was no better person to speak on this subject. For you were convinced that the European Monetary Union was the historic step which would make European integration irreversible. And it was always clear to you that membership of the Monetary Union cannot be taken for granted but, rather, that it has to be earned. Every member state must fulfil the criteria and create the necessary stability culture. This was the principle to which you adhered. You yourself did much to ensure that Italy fulfilled these requirements.

Mr President, you belong to the generation of young people which was engulfed by the Second World War. You thought it was madness for Europeans to kill each other and to destroy their common culture. Your commitment to a peaceful and united Europe originated from your experiences in this war. For many decades now, you have therefore been working and campaigning for Europe – with clarity, constancy and perseverance. You therefore stand, in the best sense of the word, for the spirit and achievement which made European integration so successful and unique following the Second World War.

President Ciampi, we spoke about Europe's future in Naples just a few weeks ago. I had the feeling that you hold to the vision of Europe out of a sense of responsibility towards history. A vision which extends far beyond economic and monetary union and which is striving for deeper integration on the basis of common values and common culture. You thus expressed my own sentiments.

For me, you stand alongside Alcide De Gasperi, the Italian founding father of the United Europe. You are a shining example for me personally.

II.

Another Italian recipient of the International Charlemagne Prize, Emilio Colombo, said that every time we think about the state of European integration our initial impression is that we have reached a crossroads.

That was a quarter of a century ago. And it shows that it has always been difficult to bring Europe together. There have been frequent crises, although we have usually emerged stronger from them. Today, Europe has once more reached a crucial point in its history.

President Ciampi, you were the host when the Constitutional Treaty for Europe was launched in Rome, the founding city of the European Community, on 29 October 2004. Afterwards you said that this marked the birth of political union, a historic moment in our continent's history.

It is in the best interests of the people of Europe that the Constitutional Treaty now enter into force. It consolidates Europe as a community of values. It strengthens European democracy and grants citizens more rights. It is necessary if citizens are to enjoy the advantages of an efficient Europe.

We all sense that the world is changing. A new order is emerging. In its own vested interests, Europe must bring its weight to bear. I believe that the world would be a poorer place if Europe were not to play a prominent role in this process.

We want Europe to play a strong role because Europe has much to give: as a continent with a peaceful order and as an economic power, as a model society and as a security partner, with its cultural roots and its awareness of history. It is crucial that Europe fully exploits its potential now.

This standard which we have set for ourselves is not directed against anyone – certainly not the US which has given Europe so much: the lives of many of its sons during the Second World War and many decades of commitment to freedom, democracy and human rights. It is important to me as a German to bring this to your attention on the eve of the commemoration of 8 May 1945.

The US and Europe complement one another and can only master the challenges of the new age if they act together. This is the view taken in the US, too. President Bush demonstrated this recently by visiting the European institutions.

III.

Let us recall how Europe has evolved during the last 50 years. We may sometimes take it for granted and no longer truly appreciate it. But in the world beyond Europe, many admire what we have achieved. Wherever I have gone during the last few years, people are always impressed by Europe:

- We are 25 nations, and borders are no longer of any significance.
- Some 450 million people live in one large single market.
- We have a strong currency which is already legal tender in 12 countries. And the Monetary Union is open to all member states.
- The rule of law, respect for the dignity of the individual and protection of human rights are anchored everywhere in the Union.
- We have a wonderful diversity of culture, language and intellectual history. This diversity is a source of great wealth.
- In the European Union, patterns of political and economic thinking have developed which are attractive and relevant to the whole world.

#### IV.

We have every reason to be proud of what we have achieved in Europe. I therefore believe it is wrong to belittle what we have accomplished – or to exaggerate our problems.

However, there can be no doubt that an open debate about weaknesses and unfinished tasks in Europe is necessary, indeed imperative.

We must find answers to critical questions about the presentation and the future of the European Union. What we need now are convinced and convincing Europeans who are prepared to carry on building Europe with steadfastness and patience. President Ciampi is such a European.

#### V.

Europe has evolved as a reconciliation and peace project from the lessons learned from our history. Today, it must also prove itself in the face of the new challenges posed by the political and economic changes the world is experiencing. We must keep in mind that it will require considerable effort to make the European economic and social model, which includes a culture of social harmony, fit for the future.

The Lisbon Strategy set the right goals on employment and prosperity in the European Union. Decisive action must now follow if Europe's competitiveness is not to diminish further and political aims are to remain credible. I believe it is particularly important that we in Europe push ahead in the spheres of education, as well as research and development.

In doing so, we can, and indeed must, pool our resources at Community level and in the cooperation among member states. The maiden flight of the new Airbus is an impressive example of this. However, we will only have lasting success if every member state sorts out its own problems. That also applies to my own country. Reforms in Germany are therefore also part of Germany's responsibility towards Europe. We have already embarked along this path.

VI.

An efficient single market is Europe's strategic response to the tougher competition generated by globalization. It will help us to gain acceptance for our own ideas about globalization with a human face. Thus, despite all the current difficulties, we should stay focused on the long-term advantages of freedom of movement in the large single market. Not only economic integration in the single market but also the single currency gives us the strength to take advantage of the benefits of globalization and to limit the risks.

Are we really aware of the contribution the euro has made towards stability in Europe? I well recall how tensions within the European Monetary System led to its suspension in 1992/93. I myself travelled to Rome at that time to consult with the Italian Government and the then Central Bank President Ciampi to find a solution. The monetary crisis brought with it acute strains, both in political and interpersonal terms. President Ciampi and I experienced this together in those days during difficult discussions. And today? Today, currency crises in Europe are a thing of the past. And the euro has done much to foster the stability of the entire global monetary system!

VII.

Last year I met German, Estonian and Polish students in the market square in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. The enthusiasm for open borders and for valuable encounters at a university abroad was tangible. These young people derived great pleasure from Europe. That gave me hope for Europe's future.

But I also know that the idea of the institutional Europe evokes other sentiments in many people: namely, irritation about the lack of transparency, the regulatory frenzy and bureaucracy. Often people simply do not know how this Europe works. And that does not make things any easier.

We must all make more of an effort to explain Europe to people. That begins with language. Too often, European documents are marked by the convoluted wording born of compromises and technocratic jargon. I know from my own experience with the Maastricht Treaty how easily that can happen. The Commission and member states' governments must therefore seriously tackle the task of conveying European decisions to citizens in such a way that they understand and comprehend them. This is the only way to engender confidence in Europe in those for whom Europe was created: for its citizens.

And citizens will only have confidence in Europe if they no longer fear that an anonymous bureaucracy lacks the ability to differentiate. The Commission and Councils of Ministers should wisely restrain their desire to regulate everything. What people in their communities, regions and countries can sensibly decide for themselves, should be decided by them. Only those issues which can best be regulated at European level should be decided in Brussels.

Jacques Delors said that if we do not manage to give a soul to Europe, we will lose it. We should take this warning by another great European seriously. I believe that a discussion on Europe's identity is long overdue. And I think that we now need a phase of consolidation in European policy so that citizens can better understand what Europe is and where it is to head in future.

## VIII.

However, self-criticism is needed not only in Brussels but particularly in the capital cities of the member states. We must not throw away Europe's effectiveness in order to gain short-term advantages in domestic debates. And I also ask myself: what about the European sense of community, which always also takes into consideration the interests of others? Every member state is confronted with the temptation to mainly focus on national interests. President Ciampi, you rightly remind the major founding states that they have a special responsibility for Europe.

Initiatives for Europe can and should come from all member states. My experience is that smaller member states often wait until the larger ones propose further-reaching developments. However, initiatives can only be good if they are also geared to the interests of other, smaller member states and thus benefit the Community as a whole. Only then will they have lasting success. Europe will only succeed if all member states feel at home in it. Often it is not what is said but how it is said that matters. Leadership which takes into account the welfare of the whole Community is required. There are many successful examples of this and we all know, for instance, how much energy goes into Franco-German cooperation.

## IX.

A common European foreign policy is the most important sphere in which the European Union must be further developed in the coming years. We must continue to resolutely work on this. Europe will greatly increase its importance in its own interests and in the interests of a viable new world order if it speaks with one voice.

There are indeed initiatives which give cause for optimism. Europe has helped find a peaceful and democratic solution to the crisis in Ukraine. I am also pleased that support for a European foreign policy has grown as a result of these joint efforts, especially in Poland which has shown such commitment.

However, I still see many questions in which Europe is called upon to find a common stance. I am thinking here of the still unresolved problems in the Balkans and of the United Nations. The fight against global poverty is another of these issues.

## X.

Alcide De Gasperi said here in Aachen in 1952 that optimism is a constructive force when it comes to realizing a great political and human ideal such as European integration.

Today's recipient of the International Charlemagne Prize, the Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, has this optimism. He carries the European torch with tireless dedication. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi is a great European. I hope that his ideas will continue to be heard in tomorrow's Europe. That will benefit us all. He deserves our thanks and recognition.