

Sperrfrist Redebeginn
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort



**Verleihung des
Internationalen Karlspreises zu Aachen 2015**

an den

Präsidenten des Europäischen Parlaments

Martin Schulz

**Dankesrede von
Martin Schulz,
Präsident des Europäischen Parlaments**

englisch

**Speech by Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament,
to mark his receipt of the International Charlemagne Prize in Aachen
14 May 2015**

- Check against delivery -

Embargo: beginning of the speech

Ladies and gentlemen,

When I was a boy, every year on Ascension Day my father, a policeman, was assigned to the detail whose duty it was to protect dignitaries attending the Charlemagne Prize award ceremony. I kept asking my mother where he was and what he was doing, and so she started taking me along to Aachen Town Hall. Standing next to my mother in the marketplace and seeing Jens Otto Krag or Joseph Luns waving from the town hall steps, I never dreamed that one day I, too, would be awarded the Charlemagne Prize.

I am deeply touched, humbled and, yes, proud, as a child of this region, to be given this prestigious award by the citizens of Aachen.

Many of the Charlemagne Prize winners who have spoken here before me were architects of European integration. They built the House of Europe. As a child of the post-war era, I have had the good fortune to grow up and live in that House.

It could be said that inhabitants of border areas are instinctively European. For all of us who grew up after the war in this part of the world where Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium meet, in this microcosm of Europe, borders decisively shaped our outlook. For all of us, nearby borders, marked by wooden barriers, were a part of our everyday lives. Long queues formed at these borders when people wanted to cross over at the weekend to go shopping or visit relatives on the other side. Sometimes these borders were closed because of a football match. We all know how restricting borders can be and how liberating it can be when they are opened. To my mind, hardly anything so perfectly embodies the achievements of European unification as open borders. At the same time, we should remember that the lifting of the barriers which the borders represented was only the culmination of a lengthy process of overcoming other barriers - cultural, economic and linguistic.

We overcame what divided us in order to create something that unites us. That is Europe's message: overcome divisions in order to create unity. That is why I will vehemently oppose any attempt to take away this freedom, any attempt to reintroduce borders, any attempt to create new divisions between us!

For many years, I was Mayor of Aachen's neighbouring town of Würselen, and so I had the enormous privilege of experiencing Europe as a daily reality. At that time, the firm conviction grew in me that political decisions must always be taken as close to the people as possible, that politics needs a human face, that politics must be both relevant to people's lives and readily understandable.

In my political career at European level, however, I have often found that ordinary people simply don't understand the European Union. They equate 'the EU' with faceless institutions, far removed from their daily lives, the Brussels spaceship, a bloated bureaucracy. It worries me that people are becoming increasingly alienated from Europe, that they are turning their backs on it and that they no longer feel at home in the House of Europe.

Having said that, the idea on which Europe is founded - overcoming what divides us by means of cooperation between states and peoples across borders - is not in question. But fewer and fewer people associate it with 'the EU'. The question now is: do we give up on the idea, or do we make the EU easier to understand and more effective? I firmly believe that we should take the latter course of action and develop this great idea of ours even further.

I have therefore made it my task, as President of the European Parliament, to throw open the doors and windows of the House of Europe so that people can look in and gain a better insight into what is happening inside: who does what, when, where and why. Only in this way can the trust we have lost be recovered.

This is the common goal I share with European Council President Donald Tusk and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, both of them former winners of the Charlemagne Prize.

Why do we share this goal? Because mistrust generates resentment, whilst trust generates optimism.

Yet mistrust has grown in recent years and has unleashed forces which are determined to roll back Europe, which speak the language of renationalisation, which call our democracy into question and which are even prepared to destroy the EU.

There is no guarantee that our way of life will last forever. It is foolish, therefore, to think that there is no alternative to the EU. Of course there is, and we should spell it out: the alternative to the EU is renationalisation.

That is why we face a choice: do we want to stand alone and divided, or stand together in defence of our social model and our competitiveness in a globalised world?

Blinkered nationalism encourages a return to an idealised vision of the nation state as an Island of the Blessed and suggests that there are easy solutions, such as 'close the borders' or 'abolish the euro', to the highly complex problems facing the world in the 21st century. But using national approaches and instruments to address what have become European problems - that is a recipe for failure.

I am convinced that if Europe collapses into its constituent parts, it will sink into irrelevance. Together, however, we Europeans form a strong community of states and peoples that guarantees the rights of its citizens - rights for which people elsewhere in the world are forced to demonstrate and even risk their lives. Elsewhere in the world, after all, there is child labour, torture, the death penalty; strikers are shot at by the police; and access to the internet is cut off when people express views which displease the regime in power.

But if the countries where these things happen are more competitive than us Europeans, precisely because they fail to uphold fundamental rights, then once again we are faced with a choice: we can either become like them, or we can bravely declare that anyone who wants access to our market - the richest market in the world - or who wants to trade and do business with us has to accept the rights and standards *we* uphold. Our economic strength derives from the internal market, a grouping of economies which are strong precisely because they are interconnected. From this position of strength, we can defend the values on which our society is based. This, then, is the challenge facing Europe: internally united and thus stronger vis-à-vis the rest of the world, to safeguard democracy and the rule of law and social and economic justice in the 21st century.

Anyone who dares to question this project is playing fast and loose with the prospects of future generations.

Each generation inherits certain things from the previous one and bequeaths certain things to the next. My generation inherited the House of Europe from the courageous men and women who made up the founding generation. Those men and women decided, in the light of our tragic history, to bind our interests so inextricably together that war would be impossible and to create the sense of common purpose that would enable us to meet the challenges of the post-war era together. That we Europeans should have succeeded in this aim has been, in my eyes, the greatest achievement of our European civilisation since the Enlightenment. This bold decision has secured us 70 years of peace and democracy in Western Europe, and finally brought the same peace and democracy to the whole of Europe following the fall of the Berlin Wall 25 years ago.

What my generation must now do is make sure that we do not bequeath this great House of Europe to our children as a ruin. And that is the task with which we were entrusted by the founders of the Aachen Charlemagne Prize in the 1950s, when the city itself lay in ruins.

In order to safeguard the European unification process for our children, we need to regain the trust we have lost and at long last create a Europe that ordinary people can understand, give Europe a face that they can recognise.

The process of nominating '*Spitzenkandidaten*' (leading candidates), a German term that has rightly found its way into many other languages, was a step in the right direction.

For the first time, we saw candidates setting out their policy programmes in order to campaign for votes in the run-up to the 2014 European elections.

For the first time, the Commission President was democratically elected. At national level this is a standard procedure - in Europe it is an exciting new development. The European Parliament will never give up this hard-won right!

If this has meant that some individuals have seen their powers diminish, it has also meant that voters have acquired a greater say in EU affairs.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want to issue an appeal to the EU heads of government, to those who are present here today and to those who are not: stop blaming Brussels for everything that goes wrong and for every intractable problem and claiming every success as a national achievement! All you are doing is turning more and more people against the EU.

I understand how difficult it is to acknowledge that as nation states in the globalised 21st century we can no longer go it alone if we want to keep our place at the top table, to fight climate change, to conduct trade, to maintain the competitiveness of our economy and our values-based social model - we can only do so if we work together with our European partners and the European institutions. I am well aware that making a commitment of this kind to the EU is no short cut to greater popularity.

But should be much easier for us today than it was for the founding generation in the aftermath of the Second World War! Bringing about reconciliation with German neighbours who had wreaked unprecedented devastation and havoc throughout Europe – that took courage and vision. If, back in the 1950s, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman and Paul-Henri Spaak had had their eyes fixed only on the latest opinion polls and the next elections - as my generation of politicians has today - European unification would never have come about.

Europe needs that courage and vision again now, and policies geared to the long term! Enough of the crisis management of the past few years, characterised by short-termism, cautious manoeuvring, muddling through from one last-chance summit to the next: it is high time that we called a spade a spade, tackle problems head on and came up with lasting solutions.

Lest we forget: many of the great political projects of the past were initially greeted by contemporaries with scepticism. To give just two examples, Konrad Adenauer's policy of anchoring Germany in the Western camp and Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* were as controversial as they were far-sighted, but proved successful in the end.

Ladies and gentlemen,

European added value is more than just the sum of the national interests of 28 Member States. But there certainly is such a thing as the European public interest and our task is to maximise it. What we need, therefore, is closer cooperation in Europe.

If we stick together as Europeans, there is so much we can achieve. In our response to the Ukraine crisis – this war in our own backyard – over the past few months we have achieved an unprecedented degree of common purpose in our foreign policy. National governments have put aside their individual interests, selfishness and vanity and agreed on a common European approach. So far no Member State has budged from that common approach. That is a success in itself. If everyone pursues their own interests, we are weak; if we stand united, however, we are strong.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The farther you go away from Europe, the more you can feel the force of the European idea, the greater people's enthusiasm is for European unification. On the *Maidan*, Ukrainians brandished our European flag. For people throughout the world, Europe stands for the defence of human dignity. Europe means hope for a better future.

I therefore want to send this message from Aachen today: let's stop trampling on the European Union. We have achieved so much by working together, as we Germans in particular would do well to remember: enemies have become friends, dictatorships have given way to democracies, borders have been opened, the largest and most prosperous internal market in the world has been created. We have human rights and freedom of the press and we have abolished the death penalty and child labour. Why shouldn't we be proud of our achievements?

In our European House many different families live, and some new ones have recently moved in. The atmosphere is lively, and sometimes even a bit rowdy, but never violent. We inherited this great House from our parents, and now it is starting to show its age. For that reason I say: let us renovate it, so that its true colours shine for everyone to see. I hope you feel as I do: I am grateful for the privilege of being a resident of this House.