

**"SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA AND THE ST. JAMES 'S
PILGRIMAGE: A EUROPEAN DIMENSION". PRESENTATION IN
THE CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY THE KONRAD-
ADENAUER-STIFTUNG,
SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA.
29th APRIL 2012**

**Mr. President of the Bundestag,
Vice-Ministers of Spain, Germany and Portugal,
Authorities,
Parliamentary colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends.**

It is my honor today to take the floor during this dinner and refer to the European dimension of the Camino de Santiago, or, in English, Way of Saint James.

I want to thank the Konrad- Adenauer-Stiftung and, in particular, Thomas Stehling, for giving me this opportunity. Being a Member of the European Parliament who belongs to Galicia and being the Chairman of the Ways of Saint James Intergroup, I am very proud to talk to this distinguished audience tonight about the links between the Ways of St James and Europe.

Let me begin with a clear statement: Ways to Compostela have contributed significantly to the creation of the European culture and a common European identity. I remind you that, as Goethe said, Europe was built on the pilgrimages to Compostela.

Indeed, one of the first projects common to Europe was the Way of Saint James. Thus, the map that experts convened by the Council of Europe drew up twenty five years ago shows that, in the early Modern Age, the routes used for the pilgrimage to Santiago covered practically all of Europe. This is the reason why I prefer to talk about Ways in plural, Caminos, and not just Way, Camino.

Following the discovery of the tomb of the Apostle in the ninth century, the Way soon became a European route. Between the years 950 and 951, it is known that a pilgrimage to Compostela was carried out by a very relevant French visitor, the Bishop of Le Puy Gotescalco. It is also documented that between the years 930 and 931 a disabled German monk did the Way to Santiago.

In the eleventh century a large number of Frenchmen, Germans, Englishmen and Italians were already making the pilgrimage. Santiago would soon be one of the three major pilgrimage routes of Christendom, with Rome and Jerusalem. In the following centuries, nationals of other European countries followed in their footsteps.

The pilgrimage to Compostela also symbolizes a set of values and ideas that are very closely linked to the views that many Europeans have of mankind and of the construction of Europe. Indeed, principles, religious ideals and values such as freedom, solidarity and reconciliation have always been present in the Ways of Saint James.

If I may, I would like to dwell on some ideas or values that underlie the process of European integration represented by the EU, and which are also characteristic of the Camino de Santiago.

We know the important place that the idea of forgiveness holds in the Way of Saint James, through the indulgences granted to pilgrims during Holy Years.

On the other hand, the current European integration process starts after World War II. It was really amazing that, shortly after the war, the European peoples would decide to embark on a path of integration.

For Joseph Weiler, in his very well-known book "A Christian Europe," the creation of a European community could not only be due to a requirement of peace established, for example, in the United Nations Charter, but had to have a deeper origin, such as the Christian idea of forgiveness, of Christian love. Weiler links this idea with the religious beliefs of the so-called "founding fathers": Adenauer, De Gasperi and Schuman.

Another one of the European founding fathers, Jean Monnet, has also emphasized the ethical or moral dimension of the process of European integration. In his Memoirs, he insists on what he calls "la

dimension morale" of the European integration process and how this idea was also shared by Adenauer in a meeting that they held on the 23rd of May 1950 to talk about the Schuman Declaration done two weeks before. This moral aspect is more underlined in Jean Monnet's version of the meeting than in Adenauer's "Memoirs".

Sixty years later, in March 2010, when Herman Van Rompuy accepted the Honorary Doctorate from the University of Leuven, the current President of the European Council said: "The European idea stems precisely from the tragedy of war, of genocide. Europe has been invented by forgiveness, that great virtue which Christianity has taught but has been practiced so little".

The idea of forgiveness and reconciliation, a backbone of the pilgrimage to Santiago, is also one of the driving forces of the EU, as the current President of the European Council recognizes.

Another crucial concept in the set of ideas and values which underpin the Way of Saint James is hope. In the Middle Ages this virtue is represented by Saint James, as it is reflected, for example, in Book I of the Codex Calixtinus. Saint Peter represents faith and Saint John, charity.

Two centuries later, Dante, in the Divine Comedy, in the Book of Paradise, also presents St. James as the Apostle of hope in a famous dialogue between St. James, the poet, and Beatrix.

I must mention President Van Rompuy again. Both in his speech in Leuven as well as last March in his acceptance speech of his second term as President of the European Council, he stressed that "the word Europe has been a sign of hope...". Then, in his second speech, he added, "It is my and our role, that Europe again becomes a symbol of hope", as well as "Europe must remain a symbol of hope".

On the other hand, in the Preamble of the failed European Constitution, hope also occupied a prominent place. It referred to Europe as a "special area for human hope".

These very recent texts highlight the connection between Europe and hope, a virtue that many pilgrims share and was symbolized by the Apostle Saint James. Indeed, many pilgrims travel with the desire for a new beginning. They believe that renewal is possible, that there is not a

single inevitable destiny, that it is possible to change, to start or to progress towards a new life path.

The European project also represents hope, a new beginning of peace, prosperity and unity against the horror of war and nationalistic extremism.

Another value closely related to the European Union and to the Ways of Saint James is solidarity. Solidarity is a key element in the current European construction. It is already reflected in the Schuman Declaration and is embodied in the letter and spirit of the treaties concluded over the past 60 years, as well as in the Charter of Fundamental Rights with a specific chapter.

The Ways of Saint James are routes of solidarity, of encounter, of openness to the other, of fraternity among people of different origins. Furthermore, pilgrims could soon benefit from a vast net of hospitals and shelters. Hospitality is a key concept in pilgrimage. Very early they also enjoyed special protection from the public authorities, to the extent that some have come to write about the existence of an international law for the pilgrims. In short, in the Ways of Saint James there have been solidarity among the pilgrims and solidarity, special protection, towards them.

El Camino is also, so to speak, a symbol, a metaphor for the current process of European construction. In fact, the pilgrimage to Santiago has been a place of dialogue and coexistence for many Europeans, far from the exclusion caused by nationalism, the cancer of Europe, as Adenauer said.

In the Middle Ages many pilgrims came together in Santiago. They had different origins, but they shared objectives and core values, and were aware of belonging to the Christian community, without prejudice to their national or local ties. The Way of Saint James is an example of the synthesis of unity and diversity, as is the Europe of today. "United in diversity", as we say.

As Pope John Paul II declared, the pilgrims were "the first owners of the European conscience."

Furthermore, the routes to Compostela were also a powerful network for cultural, musical, literary and artistic exchanges.

A strong wave for construction began on the Way of Saint James; very soon churches, cathedrals, shelters and hospitals emerged. Great architectural styles such as Romanesque and Gothic have magnificent examples throughout the Jacobean routes.

So much so, that the Ways to Santiago were recognized in 1987 by the Council of Europe as the First European Cultural Itinerary.

In short, the Way was an important physical route, a spiritual backbone and a source of culture and art in Europe. The artistic European features cannot be explained without the role played by the Caminos.

Now, as a second part of my intervention, I would like to explain that, in my opinion, the history of the Camino has developed in parallel, so to speak, with the evolution of the continent.

Thus, from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, its vitality in Europe grew. But the European wars and especially the Protestant Reformation affected it greatly.

In some parts of Europe where the Reformation triumphed, the pilgrimage to Santiago was even banned. It was reduced to a phenomenon of, basically, the Iberian Peninsula and the other countries of Catholic Europe. I must underline here that the Portuguese pilgrimage to Santiago, what we call "The Portuguese Way", was always very significant.

To say it briefly, the European wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gradually contributed to the decline of the Ways. Moreover, the unstable situation in nineteenth-century Spain did not help. The Way of Saint James almost fell into oblivion.

However, at the end of that century, a timid recovery of the Jacobean phenomenon would begin in Europe. But afterwards the two European wars took place...

It is in recent decades that the Ways have undergone a real renaissance. The role of impulse and promotion played by the Xunta de Galicia, particularly through its Xacobeian plans, was decisive.

On the other hand, I wish to emphasize the importance of the Holy Year of 1982, with the visit of John Paul II to Santiago. His

famous speech on November 9th, asserting the importance of the Jacobean tradition and calling on Europe to be true to itself and not forget its Christian roots, was a turning point.

The Holy Year of 1993 is also noteworthy. The number of visitors to Santiago experienced a dramatic increase.

That same year a Congress of Jacobean Studies was held in Santiago, through which the International Committee of Experts on Way of Saint James was created, under the auspices of the Galician regional government. This Committee has had a key role in researching the pilgrimage to Santiago. Two German professors, Robert Plötz and Klaus Herbers belong to it.

Moreover, in 1987 the Council of Europe, as I have said, declared the Way of Saint James the First European Cultural Itinerary.

In that decade, in many Western European nations, associations of friends of the Way of Saint James emerged and Jacobean studies flourished.

Apart from France -where the Jacobean associations have older roots- I am thinking of Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland etc.

Summarizing, civil society in Western Europe has greatly contributed to the international revitalization of the Way. Nowadays there are very active associations in Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic... The process of European reunification and the recovery of freedom in Central and Eastern Europe have brought with them a real renaissance of the Way, also in those countries.

In the European Parliament itself there is a Ways of Saint James Intergroup which I am honored to chair, with over 60 Members from 18 States. Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, who is here today with us, has been a very active and important member of the Intergroup. The current Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jose Manuel García-Margallo, has also been a prominent member of the Intergroup.

It has its precedent in the Intergroup founded and presided by Gerardo Fernández Albor in the nineties.

In short, the vitality of the Ways has been linked to the situation in Europe and to the flowering of the European ideals. Nowadays, the pilgrimage to Santiago is blooming.

Official figures of pilgrimages speak for themselves, in particular the ones referring to the last Holy Year 2010. The role played by the current Autonomous Galician Government in the promotion of the Way has been crucial.

The international dimension does nothing but grow. In 2011 almost 47% of the official pilgrims are foreigners, and the German pilgrims continue to be the most numerous.

By the way, Pope Benedict XVI visited Santiago de Compostela, in November, in that Holy Year of 2010.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In these last few years, European citizens seem to have been gradually drifting away from the process of European construction - visible in the referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005- . I think that to remember the role of the Ways of Saint James in the creation of Europe is useful in order to show that the EU is not an artificial construction, but has very deep and strong roots.

Furthermore, we are now undergoing a severe economic crisis and many Europeans feel disheartened, pessimistic. We politicians must restore, for our citizens and for ourselves, the idea of Europe as a place of hope, a value so closely related to the pilgrimage to Compostela.

Let me finish by saying that to speak today of the Way of Saint James is not purely a historical exercise of looking back in time.

It is also a living reality that is flourishing once again. At the same time, it symbolizes the values of our present European Union, that is to say, reconciliation, unity, progress, solidarity and hope. Values that we want to preserve for future generations.

Thank you very much for your attention.

**Francisco Millán Mon
29th April 2012**