

Retention period: commencement of the speech.
The spoken word shall prevail.

Round Table Speech

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International Conference

“Orient et Occident – civilisations en dialogue”

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“Current Challenges for the Occident in the Age of Globalisation”

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(20 minutes)

1. **Excellencies,**

Dear Friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

2. Europe, the Occident, was always shaped, transformed and renewed by the history. The interactions with the Orient were always part of this process. Nowadays, together with the Orient, Europe is passing again through a period of transition: we have to adapt to the opportunities and the challenges of globalisation.

In the European history, we have struggled to find the right relationship between freedom and authority, between command and law. We have seen the spread of democracy and again the brutality of dictators who wanted to impose totalitarian ideologies on their own and other nations.

But the last sixty years were the most peaceful time Europe has ever seen. The material and cultural wealth that the continent has reached through these years, is an infinite treasure that we have to maintain.

But this is not for granted. We feel much change in the orientations and behaviours of our citizens. Europeans are seeking for stable values and a moral compass for themselves and even more for their children. Therefore, it is particularly important that the intercultural dialogue will involve all groups.

Respect and consideration of cultural diversity is indeed nothing new for the European Union. On the contrary, since establishing the European Community it is now for nearly sixty years an integral part of the European political culture.

Think of the effort to promote social, regional and territorial cohesion, to the actions of the European Union in the field

of gender equality and non-discrimination. The policies of the Union in the education and training sector promote intercultural dialogue, mutual knowledge, understanding and an open mind to the concerns of others and for the richness of other cultures and religions.

3. Our modern societies have reached phases that are, nevertheless, characterised by the "principle of uncertainty". The choices are almost unlimited. So, it is more and more difficult for politicians to predict all factors that determine the policy of the continent – a continent that is more and more influenced by the globalisation and that has to deal, more than ever, with an ongoing digitalisation.

The progressing digitalisation brings up a big block of political questions. It is about a new understanding of the relationship between the state and the citizens, between the economy and the science. It gives us opportunities to live our life more flexible and diverse.

The benefits of the digitalisation go hand in hand with the potential risks. Therefore, we have to handle our digital resources and tools responsibly. Governments and the European Union must play a key role in keeping the citizens' data safe and secure. Regulation should protect the rights of citizens, while supporting innovation at the same time.

National solutions won't help us, because the digital world does not accept any borders. Thus, a strong European ethical framework for the Digital Economy is required. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a joint approach.

4. But from a security policy point of view, digitalisation is also a challenge. Virtually performed attacks on states, organisations as well as on individuals are increasing. We have converted most of our sensitive data into the digital world and thus, those damages can be highly threatening. Hence, modern security policy must also have in view the risks of our progressing digitalisation.

Digitalisation has no limits. Terrorist attacks, planned across national borders, will also not be countered effectively by national borders alone. Terrorism must be considered in Europe, but also in the Orient, as a fight that only can be fought together.

We Europeans – in dialogue with our neighbours and partners – need an ambitious European security strategy with a vision for Europe's role in the world. We need to strengthen the cooperation of our national military forces with the goal of joint military action. In the fight against terrorism, a better exchange of information between our intelligence services is indispensable, as well as a closer cooperation between both police and judicial authorities.

A European Border and Coast Guard with far-reaching powers is the right solution when it comes to defending our freedoms. This does not mean the sealing of Europe towards refugees and thus against its responsibility. A joint

border control will rather cut off the paths of criminal networks such as drug and human traffickers.

The design of the external border of the European Union, which enables an orderly immigration focused on the human dignity, is probably the greatest present and future challenge for us in the European Union.

5. In recent times, especially burdens dominate public discussions. The immigration of several millions of refugees is worrying a great number of people in Europe. This creates an unverified fear towards the alleged "other", mostly being associated with the Islam. It is more than likely that Islam will be of even higher importance – or at least visibility – in European countries by the immigration of refugees coming from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq.

But the immigration of refugees to European countries, most of them being of Muslim faith, should not be seen as a burden but mainly as a chance. It is a chance to talk more about our own religious and cultural heritage and origins in Europe. Instead of speaking about negative consequences of immigration, we should be aware that the refugees coming to Europe do so in order to search for shelter and asylum because of war situations. As Christians and as democrats it is our humanitarian responsibility to help those who search for solidarity.

We always speak of values such as dignity, freedom and solidarity, so, hence, we also need to address the difficult situation of the Christian population in the Orient. It is worrying that Christians face persecution in so many countries - many of them being in the Middle East. And it is alarming that several Christian dignitaries warn these days that in the birthplace of Christianity an exodus of Christians is already going on and seems to become more intensive.

As brothers and sisters of monotheistic religions we should all stand together and condemn any acts of violence or discrimination in the name of religion of any kind. And as democrats we should stand next to minorities who face discrimination.

In the last months repeatedly reports were published whereas Christian refugees were discriminated or faced violence by other refugees only because of their religious affiliation. Together we should formulate the conviction that the freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right which is valid for all believers of all religions worldwide.

An equal dialogue on a common level can only be successful if we stand together and formulate clearly towards extremists that the peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Jews and Christians will not be endangered by fundamentalists.

6. The opposite of a dialogue is an insufficient exchange of experiences that leads to prejudices and fears, ultimately promoting the ideas of populists. But if Europe's opponents try to put the unity of our continent in question and return to nationalism, then this has to make us, as convinced Europeans, even stronger, more committed, more confident and more courageous. We need to act even more determined!

The nationalists and populists across Europe should realize that we can only serve the values and interests of our people in the 21st century as Europeans with a developed European identity in addition to a local and national identity. It means that we cannot let populist forces dominate our national political discussions and agendas.

We have not yet passed the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The global financial crisis starting in 2008 – that has been developing into a debt

crisis in Europe – has pumped up those populist opinions on the right and left political spectrum.

Populist forces, for example in Germany, try to create an atmosphere, which is dominated by fear. Following this strategy, people shall fear a loss of welfare, a loss of values and of cultural assets. Instead of blaming their own national failures the guilt is transferred to others. This kind of political behaviour leads to unconstructive debates in Europe, which is creating instability. But this stability arises from the inside of our shared beliefs and values.

However, the consolidation of the economies of countries such as Ireland and Portugal show the positive effects of European Rescue Mechanisms. In order to ensure Europe's competitiveness on a global scale and to review the so far fragile construction of the Euro, however, we require the completion of the Economic and Monetary Union.

7. This is even more important when keeping in mind the climate change and its enormous financial costs. Handling the impacts of the climate change will be a key challenge for our economies, the European continent and our planet as a whole.

But the demand for energy is still rising, in Europe and worldwide. Prices for fossil fuels have fallen drastically in recent times. This means that oil, coal and gas remain attractive to many countries for covering their increasing energy demand. A true turning point in the development of global green-house gas emissions is therefore not yet in sight.

Thus, it seems all the more remarkable that the 196 contracting parties attending the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) – here in Paris at the end of last year – agreed on the goal of reaching the turning point in global green-house gas emissions as quickly as possible, as well as on the goal of balancing man-made emissions

and their absorption in the second half of the century. It is important to note that it is no longer merely the industrialised countries that consider themselves responsible for reducing their emissions, but now basically all countries.

The question is now how we can develop sustainable ways of living and economic activities for the long term. Closely linked to the issue of climate change is, thus, a sustainable energy supply. The expansion of renewable energies is an urgent task of the 21st century, which is crucial for the future of our societies and of our continent.

8. We will have to cope with all these challenges with an aging population in Europe. The demographic change requires probably the biggest restructuring of social systems and labour markets. Guaranteeing pensions, the care of those who need medical assistance and the potential of an older society are issues that must be tackled early on. That means today.

In doing so, there can be different models and ways to implement the desired conditions. The differences within Europe must not be perceived as separating. Rather, it is the "unity in diversity" that we need to realise. However, differences in the conception and design of basic values, in turn, need to be clearly communicated. Only then a discussion about such values is possible.

All this is accompanied by an increasing individualisation. This means traditional concepts of society erode and are supplemented by new models of coexistence, especially in families. The politics need to analyse it and - where necessary - adjust to it, just like the religions need to. It is therefore important not only to maintain the dialogue between the great religions.

9. It seems, at least in Europe, that religion has become a matter of individual choice – and is no longer a question of origin, tradition or social status. Religion in modern times is often determined by choices of individuals, which play a

crucial role. For some people it seems to be, that the "Cult of the individual" is the future religion, and the belief in human rights becomes the moral core of the societies.

This individualism does not stand in conflict with the concept of religions. On the contrary: religions, especially Christianity, have prepared the ground for the modern cult of the individual with the idea of God's immediacy in every human being.

I don't think that religion is losing its significance, because it is not just a statement of belief, but also it is identifying ways of a good and meaningful life including social practices. Thus, religions also determines politics.

The society thrives on the commitment of citizens who act out of their persuasions – aimed at the common good beyond their own selfishness. In this context, religions are irreplaceable.

For a long time, religious communities and religions as such were not included in the legal framing of the European Union. But nowadays we have an explicit linkage as the special role of religious communities is stipulated in Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which is a part of the Lisbon Treaty. It also highlights and recognises the importance of an Intercultural Dialogue. In 2008, at the time when I was President of the European Parliament, the Intercultural Dialogue was the central message of the European institutions.

In my various former capacities as the Chairman of the European People's Party-European Democrats, as a member and President of the European Parliament, the promotion of intercultural dialogue and fundamental rights, which also includes religion, was always a high priority for myself.

Therefore I was pleased to hear that Jean-Claude Juncker recently announced Ján Figel' as a Special Envoy for the promotion of religious freedom. Thus, a key challenge in

Europe, the promotion of intercultural exchange and dialogue will be pushed on. This is something Pope Francis – who was recently decorated with the European Charlemagne Prize – claims since his inauguration. In the end, the creation of an inclusive Europe must be our common goal.

Social cohesion in the societies is not yet guaranteed by a common language or a common constitution, but by a minimum of common conceptions of human dignity, freedom, justice, solidarity and democracy. This is achieved only by a continuous dialogue between all involved parties.

Because of the relevance of the freedom of religion and belief, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung organised together with international partners in New York in September 2015 a first conference to discuss the current status quo in this field. More than 140 parliamentarians from more than 100 countries took part in this international conference. In September 2016, a second conference about the freedom

of religion and belief will take place in Berlin, again co-organised by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

10. Dialogue means listening, recognizing, exchanging and, where it is possible then, joint action. Only if people communicate in an open way, we will come closer together and develop an understanding of each other. Such dialogue requires mutual respect to the dignity, beliefs and views of each partner, without trying to unify the cultural differences of people. We need to understand the variety – when it turns out peacefully – as mutual enrichment and strength.

The more open the intercultural dialogue is conducted; the more we are able to anchor this dialogue in society, the more successful our efforts will be.

The core of intercultural dialogue is tolerance. Tolerance does not mean arbitrariness. Tolerance means to represent the own views and listen to the beliefs of others with respect. Where it is not possible to accept the other's

position, there is nevertheless a need to address the ideas peacefully. We must emphasize the similarities, the substance of our common values. These should mainly include human dignity and inalienable human rights.

Who respects the dignity of every human being, is free from suspicion and prejudice. Being open to new ideas, to be curious about foreign cultures and religions is an important prerequisite for cooperation in the world. And cooperation is the most important element of globalisation.

Thank you very much for your attention!
