

Lyon 2006 - Opening Speeches

EIN Summer University and European Ideas Fair

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The main idea of the European Ideas Network is to involve think tanks that are close to our political family, and to leave day by day issues aside in order to think broadly about the future. For several years I have had the pleasure to participate in these meetings and I'm always impressed by the fruitful debate and the fresh discussions. I'm convinced that this concept is vital for us as a political family. The European Ideas Fair has had a lot of success in assembling leading figures of the EPP in the European Parliament and the Member States as well as highly respected representatives from think tanks. Therefore, we committed ourselves to work more closely with the European Ideas Network and we will continue to do so.

This Summer University was given the title "The World in 2020: Facing the Challenges of Tomorrow." Europe has undergone remarkable development during the last 50 years. Today we remember the 60th anniversary of the speech of Winston Churchill on Europe. On the 19th of September 1946, in front of the students of the University of Zurich, the British Prime Minister called for European unity. It was not a coincidence that this great statesman addressed his ideas to the upcoming generation. In his view, only European integration could ensure peace, security and welfare for Europe. Only one year after the cruelties of WWII and the defeat of the Third Reich, Churchill took up the initiative for a visionary and at the same time pragmatic project for Europe's future.

Peace and reconciliation are the prime ideals of the founding fathers of Europe. They were changed by two wars that shattered our continent. The whole world was dragged along in this destruction. The human values of western civilisation were hurt in their deepest core and millions of Europeans were subjected after WWII to communist rule. Finally divergent interests and conflicts had to be peacefully resolved throughout consolidation and common decision-making in European institutions.

This ideal developed into the biggest historical reform of the 20th century. It sets an example for the entire world. The fathers of Europe already belong to history. Their heirs are certainly equally motivated to safeguard peace and promote reconciliation, but have never been confronted with the cruelty of war. Today they face totally new challenges and fundamental risks. True globalisation of the present world, merging into one. It is a dangerous illusion to believe that nation states alone are still able to confront this challenge and to secure the economy, the well-being, the culture and the identity of the European peoples. Only when a new generation of leaders emerges who are capable of convincing and committing their citizens to the European ideal, will it be possible to assure the future of their people. But today Europe is often described as backward and lagging behind. For many citizens, the European project has lost its fascination.

It is therefore crucial that we concentrate our efforts to maintain the momentum of Europe as a project turned to the future. Many challenges lay before us. In the next days we will have the opportunity to discuss the most important ones. Today, Europe is no longer a happy island. More and more we face competition with our trading partners in the world, especially with Asia. We have to analyse clearly what the main challenges and chances are related to the emerging Asian states. Internally, we have to set out the right priorities for a European revival.

We very much welcome the efforts of José Manuel and his colleagues in order to initiate the right policies for a European revival. This revival is also linked to other questions that merit deep analysis and require new answers. The security of energy supply, the threat of terrorism, the creation of new jobs, demographic changes and immigration, and food safety are future challenges, but also the geographic limits of the European Union, the future of transatlantic relations, globalisation and the impact of the digital economy have to be discussed.

We have to reflect on how to organize good European governance and how to deal with economic, monetary, and fiscal policy.

Europe still has a lot of potential. I know from meetings with representatives from other continents that our way of life and our strength are still admired. The EPP's credo has always been to combine necessary reforms with the preservation of our values and traditions. This way is the best option for our future. This has always been our strength.

We do not know exactly how the world will be in 2020, but we are convinced that Europe can play a major role in it. During the course of the history of European integration, we have been the ones who contributed to progress, cohesion, solidarity and reconciliation. I'm sure that we will be able to play this role in the future also.