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“Europe and Culture”

Draft Opening Address

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Chancellor Schröder,
Minister Weiss,
President von Weizsäcker,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today. I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for giving me the opportunity to talk about the role of culture in the process of European integration. It is fitting for my first week in office to reflect on how the cultural heritage, the cultural diversity of Europe can further stimulate our future development, and our policies – and how European integration can further enrich the cultural life throughout the Member States.

The timing of this conference is perfect. 2004 will be remembered as a year of many beginnings: the historic enlargement, a final agreement on the text of our Constitutional Treaty, and—on the institutional level—a new Parliament and a new Commission.

We are entering a new, challenging, but also delicate, phase for Europe and for our Union.

The questions of what Europe can do for culture, and what culture can do for Europe are not new. But in this context, they have acquired a new sense of urgency. The organizers of this conference have chosen the motto “A soul for Europe”. I agree that we will master the challenges ahead only if we do some “soul-searching”. We need

common ground, and common reflection about what the EU can be, and what it will be, cannot succeed without a proper look at Europe's cultural dimension.

High-level public events like this Conference for European Cultural Policy are important contributions to the cross-border dialogue and to the emergence of a truly European public discourse. This is why I would like to say a very special word of thanks to President von Weizsäcker and to all the other personalities involved in the organization of the conference. The way in which this conference brings together leading representatives of the European Parliament, of national and regional Parliaments and Governments, with leading personalities from cultural, academic and intellectual life is exemplary. All the more so since this is a truly European event. This is why I did not hesitate to accept your invitation. Let me add that I take good note of the commitment of the German Federal Government to this initiative, as is attested by the participation of Chancellor Schröder, of Minister Weiss and of Minister Fischer. Last but not least, I also take good note of the fact that this initiative has been kicked off by experienced personalities from Berlin, which is yet another sign that this city is really at the heart of Europe – I find this is a good symbol for a Europe where what separates us is overcome, and where East and West have found each other again.

The Preamble of the Constitutional Treaty states that Europe is **“united in its diversity”**.

These words are both reassuring and ambitious.

They are reassuring, because they positively acknowledge and thus protect the extraordinary richness of our national and regional cultures.

Europe’s true “cultural identity” is made of its different heritages, of its multiplicity of histories and of languages, of its diverse literary, artistic and popular traditions.

These words are also ambitious, because they emphasise that diversity does not mean division, but that it is rather the recognition of the richness of our diversity which enables us to unite.

To put it differently, they commit us to establish the richness of our diversity as a structural element of our unity.

A sense of belonging to Europe is essential to forge that “common destiny” to which the draft Constitutional Treaty refers.

Forging this destiny will be a process based both on the autonomy and on the bringing together of European citizens and civil societies.

Our approach, based on our concept of human dignity must reconcile identity and openness, dialogue and respect.

This is a process that is unique in our history, and indeed in history at large. It has not and will not be easy. The balance we need to strike will always be a delicate one.

Today, our common European destiny is not the result of historical accident, but of deliberate choice. Our European identity is plural – because it is made of the identities of each of the peoples of Europe in their diversities – as well as singular – because it is the expression of our decision to unite, whilst recognising and respecting our differences, in a Community of values and interests, with a common determination to act together in a coherent manner. The word “identity” can be a dangerous word when one identity is pitched against others identities, as is the case with extreme nationalism. But our European identity represents the overcoming of the clash our different identities; it is an open and pluralistic experience.

If we want it to succeed, we must make the deliberate choice to use our creative energies, our potential to the full. And this includes our

cultural potential as much as our economic potential, which thus far we have been using for much longer, and much more intensively.

How can we take up this challenge? How can European policies take inspiration from our culture, its diversity and its common heritage? Above all, how can our cultural policies enrich our European identity and citizenship?

When we think of Europe's shared heritage, we can of course take pride in a glorious intellectual past.

We remember Paul Valéry's famous reference to the three sources of Europe's identity: Jerusalem, Athens and Rome.

But if the Judaeo-Christian, classic Greek and classic Roman traditions are at the beginning of our civilisation, it is also true that the European identity received inspiration from the Arab world, and contributions from Celtic, German and Slavic origins.

We can think of the "Republic of Letters", from Erasmus to Montesquieu, who stated that "Europe is just one nation made up of many". Or of Friedrich Schiller, the author of the Ode to the Joy, the hymn of human brotherhood, which is today the European anthem.

We can think of our common values: freedom, democracy, justice, solidarity, which are the result of this intellectual past. Not a result that was easily won. But a result on which we can build.

All these values, that Europe itself has so often offended in the past – through nationalism and totalitarianism - are now firmly enshrined in the draft Constitutional Treaty.

If we look at the way this result came about, we cannot but acknowledge that in order to be able to live together whilst preserving one's personal, local, regional and national identity, what is needed is the promotion of openness, knowledge and exchange. This in turn creates respect and a culture of tolerance.

The EU's cultural action as enshrined by the Treaties is based on this concept.

The EU brings Europe's common cultural heritage to the fore.

The EU's policies encourage co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, support and supplement their actions.

The EU fosters cooperation with third countries and the relevant international organisations.

And the EU takes cultural aspects into account in its action under all provisions of the Treaties.

In practical terms, the cornerstone of EU action is the opportunity for EU citizens to gain personal experience of what European citizenship and identity mean.

After all, our new Constitutional Treaty, and even the European project as such, will only be accepted if it will result from an active participation and involvement of the citizens and a public dialogue reflecting our common values. Of course, European cohesion cannot be simply created by public action: the success of the project will first of all depend on Europeans themselves. But local, national and European institutions can play important roles in creating the conditions, in offering the opportunities which favour mutual knowledge and joint initiatives.

Our citizens must have the opportunity to experience their European identity in their everyday lives; an identity that does not **subtract from** but **adds to** those already in place.

How can this objective be fulfilled?

A number of EU programmes promote the development of transnational cultural exchanges, the mobility of artists, the exchanges and the active participation of students and young people. All of you will have heard of the Erasmus programme which by now is one of the best known and best loved brand names in Europe, and in which so far over 1 million students have had the chance to participate! Reinforcing Community action in this field will be one of the priorities of my Commission. For instance, we would like to reach the goal of 3 million Erasmus students within the next generation of this programme.

We are promoting other programmes to favour cross-border mobility and exchange, be it the Youth programme, the Media Plus programme or the Culture 2000 programme.

We also want to strengthen the international dimension of our action, through initiatives like the Erasmus Mundus programme that builds on the Erasmus programme, and reinforce intercultural dialogue not only within the EU, but also with third countries.

We are taking part—together with Member States—in the discussions on a Convention for cultural diversity under the auspices of UNESCO.

The Commission's proposals for the next period of financial programming, and for the new generation of programmes covering the period 2007 from 2013, send a clear message: they are ambitious, both conceptually and financially. They promote multilateral mobility and exchange, and give a strong European added value to the action of national and local authorities and of civil society. The discussion of these proposals will – up to a point – be a litmus test of our willingness to go beyond words, and to take our action beyond what it is today.

If we really want to go further than what the Member States can do, either alone and bilaterally, if we want truly multilateral cooperation, the EU must have adequate resources for this mission.

I have already stressed the **links between culture, identity, and citizenship**.

Concerning the last of these, the recent European elections show that a real European agora is still missing. Too few people went to the polls and there has not been a full pan-European debate on the key issues.

There are many reasons for this state of affairs. One of these is a communication deficit.

Let me stress that by communication deficit I do not mean a deficit of mere messages. Our problem is not about advertising, it is about engaging in debate. There is not yet what one could call a truly “European public space”, in spite of the fact that such a space begins to emerge here and there. Jürgen Habermas made very interesting observations on this issue.

One of the main tasks of my Commission is to contribute to finding workable solutions to this challenge.

During the first quarter of next year, the Commission will present a programme to enhance civic participation at European level. And we are also developing a new information and communication strategy. As long as there are no truly “European” TV and media on a large scale, this requires a particular effort both at European and national level. And I hope that they can count on your input and your participation, because this is a task cannot be shouldered by the Commission alone. Also the Member States and the civil society can and should play a crucial role in re-connecting Europe with its citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a fact that most of the work that went into the process of European integration has been devoted to our economies and to our markets and that comparatively little has been devoted to our cultures and our civil societies.

This was not wrong at all. You know as well as I do that the famous “bon mot” attributed to Jean Monnet - that if he was going to start again, he would start with culture - is spurious, as he knew that European integration would have failed if it had not started with the economies and the markets.

Much remains to be done to boost Europe’s competitiveness and support growth, and I will spare no efforts to achieve this goal.

But the EU has reached a stage of its history where its cultural dimension can no longer be ignored. It would be a mistake to pretend that culture and economy are two totally separated worlds. Without proper attention to knowledge, science and culture, our societies at large, and our economies, cannot prosper. The distinctive element of the EU’s Lisbon strategy is indeed the will to use the European intellectual potential to the full. The debate on the ratification of the draft Constitutional Treaty will make this very clear, since now is a time when we must reflect on our foundations, and on the degree not only of economic, but of political unity we want to reach. And since I am speaking here in Germany, the motherland of subsidiarity, let me

add that the draft Constitutional Treaty very properly recognises the EU's cultural dimension not as a call for harmonization, or for standardization – but as a dimension through which we support, coordinate and complement each other.

My Commission is determined to protect and promote cultural diversity as well as to bring our common cultural heritage to the fore, as it is required to do by the Treaties.

I see this conference as a sign of encouragement and of support to this orientation, and I count on you to actively, critically and constructively accompany our efforts. In this respect, it will be very important for this conference not to remain a “one-off” event. All of those who have followed the debate on the role of culture in the process of European integration over the decades know quite well that wise words and ardent appeals for more culture in Europe and for more Europe in culture have been many, but modest in their effect. What is needed now is sustainability of action – the translation of good intentions into good decisions. I am encouraged by the fact that there are plans for a follow-up to this conference, and I look forward to hearing about it.

Let me say it again: Europe is not only about markets, it is also about values and culture. And allow me a personal remark: in the hierarchy of values, the cultural ones range above the economic ones. If the

economy is a necessity for our lives, culture is really what makes our life worth living.

I wish you the very greatest success. Thank you once again for inviting me to be here today and I trust that we will continue the dialogue about Europe and Culture we have started today. This is why I do not say “Good-Bye”, or “Adieu”, but: Auf Wiedersehen!