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“From war to peace: a European tale”

Nobel Peace Prize Lecture on behalf of the European Union

**Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council and
José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission**

[President Van Rompuy takes the floor:]

Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Heads of State and Government, Members of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with humility and gratitude that we stand here together, to receive this award on behalf of the European Union.

At a time of uncertainty, this day reminds people across Europe and the world of the Union's fundamental purpose: to further the fraternity between European nations, now and in the future.

It is our work today. It has been the work of generations before us. And it will be the work of generations after us.

Here in Oslo, I want to pay homage to all the Europeans who dreamt of a continent at peace with itself, and to all those who day by day make this dream a reality. This award belongs to them.

P R E S S

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War is as old as Europe. Our continent bears the scars of spears and swords, canons and guns, trenches and tanks, and more.

The tragedy of it all resonates in the words of Herodotus, 25 centuries ago: *"In peace, sons bury their fathers. In war, fathers bury their sons."*

Yet, after two terrible wars engulfed the continent and the world with it, finally lasting peace came to Europe.

In those grey days, its cities were in ruins, the hearts of many still simmering with mourning and resentment. How difficult it then seemed, as Winston Churchill said, *"to regain the simple joys and hopes that make life worth living"*.

As a child born in Belgium just after the war, I heard the stories first-hand. My grandmother spoke about the Great War. In 1940, my father, then seventeen, had to dig his own grave. He got away; otherwise I would not be here today.

So what a bold bet it was, for Europe's Founders, to say, yes, we can break this endless cycle of violence, we can stop the logic of vengeance, we can build a brighter future, together. What power of the imagination.

Of course, peace might have come to Europe without the Union. Maybe. We will never know. But it would never have been of the same quality. A lasting peace, not a frosty cease-fire. To me, what makes it so special, is reconciliation.

In politics as in life, reconciliation is the most difficult thing. It goes beyond forgiving and forgetting, or simply turning the page.

To think of what France and Germany had gone through, and then take this step. Signing a Treaty of Friendship. Each time I hear these words – *Freundschaft, Amitié* –, I am moved. They are private words, not for treaties between nations.

But the will to not let history repeat itself, to do something radically new, was so strong that new words had to be found. For people Europe was a promise, Europe equalled hope.

When Konrad Adenauer came to Paris to conclude the Coal and Steel Treaty, in 1951, one evening he found a gift waiting at his hotel. It was a war medal, *une Croix de Guerre*, that had belonged to a French soldier. His daughter, a young student, had left it with a little note for the Chancellor, as a gesture of reconciliation and hope.

I can see many other stirring images before me. Leaders of six States assembled to open a new future, in Rome, *città eterna*. Willy Brandt kneeling down in Warsaw. The dockers of Gdansk, at the gates of their shipyard. Mitterrand and Kohl hand in hand. Two million people linking Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius in a human chain, in 1989. These moments healed Europe.

But symbolic gestures alone cannot cement peace. This is where the European Union's "secret weapon" comes into play: an unrivalled way of binding our interests so tightly that war becomes materially impossible. Through constant negotiations, on ever more topics, between ever more countries.

It's the golden rule of Jean Monnet: "*Mieux vaut se disputer autour d'une table que sur un champ de bataille*." ("Better fight around a table than on a battle-field.") If I had to explain it to Alfred Nobel, I would say: not just a peace congress, a perpetual peace congress!

Admittedly, some aspects can be puzzling, and not only to outsiders. Ministers from landlocked countries passionately discussing fish-quota. Europarliamentarians from Scandinavia debating the price of olive oil. The Union has perfected the art of compromise.

No drama of victory or defeat, but ensuring all countries emerge victorious from talks. For this, boring politics is only a small price to pay.

It worked. Peace is now self-evident. War has become inconceivable. Yet 'inconceivable' does not mean 'impossible'.

And that is why we are gathered here today. Europe must keep its promise of peace. I believe this is still our Union's ultimate purpose. But Europe can no longer rely on this promise alone to inspire citizens.

In a way, it's a good thing; war-time memories are fading. Even if not yet everywhere. Soviet rule over Eastern Europe ended just two decades ago. Horrendous massacres took place in the Balkans shortly after. The children born at the time of Srebrenica will only turn eighteen next year. But they already have little brothers and sisters born after that war: the first real post-war generation of Europe. This must remain so.

So, where there was war, there is now peace. But another historic task now lies ahead of us: keeping peace where there is peace.

After all, history is not a novel, a book we can close after a Happy Ending: we remain fully responsible for what is yet to come.

This couldn't be more clear than it is today, when we are hit by the worst economic crisis in two generations, causing great hardship among our people, and putting the political bonds of our Union to the test.

Parents struggling to make ends meet, workers recently laid off, students who fear that, however hard they try, they won't get that first job: when they think about Europe, peace is not the first thing that comes to mind...

When prosperity and employment, the bedrock of our societies, appear threatened, it is natural to see a hardening of hearts, the narrowing of interests, even the return of long-forgotten fault-lines and stereotypes. For some, not only joint decisions, but the very fact of deciding jointly, may come into doubt. And while we must keep a sense of proportion – even such tensions don't take us back to the darkness of the past –, the test Europe is currently facing is real.

If I can borrow the words of Abraham Lincoln at the time of another continental test, what is being assessed today is "*whether that Union, or any Union so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure*".

We answer with our deeds, confident we will succeed. We are working very hard to overcome the difficulties, to restore growth and jobs. There is of course sheer necessity. But there is more that guides us: the will to remain masters of our own destiny, a sense of togetherness, and in a way speaking to us from the centuries, the idea of *Europa* itself.

The presence of so many European leaders here today underlines our common conviction: that we will come out of this together, and stronger. Strong enough in the world to defend our interests and promote our values. We all work to leave a better Europe for the children of today and those of tomorrow. So that, later, others might turn and judge: that generation, ours, preserved the promise of Europe.

Today's youth is already living in a new world. For them Europe is a daily reality. Not the constraint of being in the same boat. No, the richness of being able to freely share, travel and exchange. To share and shape a continent, experiences, a future.

Our continent, risen from the ashes after 1945 and united in 1989, has a great capacity to reinvent itself. It is to the next generations to take this common adventure further. I hope they will seize this responsibility with pride. And that they will be able to say, as we here today: *Ich bin ein Europäer. Je suis fier d'être européen. I am proud to be European.*

[President Barroso takes the floor:]

"Peace is not mere absence of war, it is a virtue", wrote Spinoza: "Pax enim non belli privatio, sed virtus est". And he added it is "a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice".

Indeed, there can only be true peace if people are confident. At peace with their political system. Reassured that their basic rights are respected.

The European Union is not only about peace among nations. It incarnates, as a political project, that particular state of mind that Spinoza was referring to. It embodies, as a community of values, this vision of freedom and justice.

I remember vividly in 1974 being in the mass of people, descending the streets in my native Lisbon, in Portugal, celebrating the democratic revolution and freedom. This same feeling of joy was experienced by the same generation in Spain and Greece. It was felt later in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States when they regained their independence. Several generations of Europeans have shown again and again that their choice for Europe was also a choice for freedom.

I will never forget Rostropovich playing Bach at the fallen Wall in Berlin. This image reminds the world that it was the quest for freedom and democracy that tore down the old divisions and made possible the reunification of the continent. Joining the European Union was essential for the consolidation of democracy in our countries.

Because it places the person and respect of human dignity at its heart. Because it gives a voice to differences while creating unity. And so, after reunification, Europe was able to breathe with both its lungs, as said by Karol Wojtyła. The European Union has become our common house. The "homeland of our homelands" as described by Vaclav Havel.

Our Union is more than an association of states. It is a new legal order, which is not based on the balance of power between nations but on the free consent of states to share sovereignty.

From pooling coal and steel, to abolishing internal borders, from six countries to soon twenty-eight with Croatia joining the family this has been a remarkable European journey which is leading us to an *"ever closer Union"*. And today one of the most visible symbols of our unity is in everyone's hands. It is the Euro, the currency of our European Union. We will stand by it.

Peace cannot rest only on the good will of man. It needs to be grounded on a body of laws, on common interests and on a deeper sense of a community of destiny.

The genius of the founding fathers was precisely in understanding that to guarantee peace in the 20th century nations needed to think beyond the nation-state. As Walter Hallstein, the first President of the European Commission said: "*Das System der Nationalstaaten hat den wichtigsten Test des 20. Jahrhunderts nicht bestanden* (*"The system of sovereign nation-states has failed the most important test of the 20th century"*). And he added "*through two world wars it has proved itself unable to preserve peace.*"

The uniqueness of the European project is to have combined the legitimacy of democratic States with the legitimacy of supranational institutions: the European Commission, the European Court of Justice. Supranational institutions that protect the general European interest, defend the European common good and embody the community of destiny. And alongside the European Council, where the governments are represented, we have over the years developed a unique transnational democracy symbolised by the directly elected European Parliament.

Our quest for European unity is not a perfect work of art; it is work in progress that demands constant and diligent tending. It is not an end in itself, but a means to higher ends. In many ways, it attests to the quest for a cosmopolitan order, in which one person's gain does not need to be another person's pain; in which abiding by common norms serves universal values.

That is why despite its imperfections, the European Union can be, and indeed is, a powerful inspiration for many around the world. Because the challenges faced from one region to the other may differ in scale but they do not differ in nature.

We all share the same planet. Poverty, organised crime, terrorism, climate change: these are problems that do not respect national borders. We share the same aspirations and universal values: these are progressively taking root in a growing number of countries all over the world. We share "*l'irréductible humain*", the irreducible uniqueness of the human being. Beyond our nation, beyond our continent, we are all part of one mankind.

Jean Monnet, ends his *Memoirs* with these words: "*Les nations souveraines du passé ne sont plus le cadre où peuvent se résoudre les problèmes du présent. Et la communauté elle-même n'est qu'un étape vers les formes d'organisation du monde de demain.*" ("The sovereign nations of the past can no longer solve the problems of the present. And the [European] Community itself is only a stage on the way to the organised world of the future.")

This federalist and cosmopolitan vision is one of the most important contributions that the European Union can bring to a global order in the making.

The concrete engagement of the European Union in the world is deeply marked by our continent's tragic experience of extreme nationalism, wars and the absolute evil of the Shoah. It is inspired by our desire to avoid the same mistakes being made again.

That is the foundation of our multilateral approach for a globalisation based on the twin principles of global solidarity and global responsibility; that is what inspires our engagement with our neighbouring countries and international partners, from the Middle East to Asia, from Africa to the Americas.

It defines our stance against the death penalty and our support for international justice embodied by the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court, it drives our leadership in the fight against climate change and for food and energy security; it underpins our policies on disarmament and against nuclear proliferation.

As a continent that went from devastation to become one of the world's strongest economies, with the most progressive social systems, being the world's largest aid donor, we have a special responsibility to millions of people in need.

In the 21st century it is simply unacceptable to see parents powerless as their baby is dying of lack of basic medical care, mothers compelled to walk all day in the hope of getting food or clean water and boys and girls deprived of their childhood because they are forced to become adults ahead of time.

As a community of nations that has overcome war and fought totalitarianism, we will always stand by those who are in pursuit of peace and human dignity.

And let me say it from here today: the current situation in Syria is a stain on the world's conscience and the international community has a moral duty to address it.

And as today marks the international human rights day, more than any other day our thoughts go to the human rights' defenders all over the world who put their lives at risk to defend the values that we cherish. And no prison wall can silence their voice. We hear them in this room today.

And we also remember that last year on this very podium three women were honoured for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights. As a Union built on the founding value of equality between women and men, enshrined in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, we are committed to protecting women's rights all over the world and supporting women's empowerment. And we cherish the fundamental rights of those who are the most vulnerable, and hold the future in their hands: the children of this world.

As a successful example of peaceful reconciliation based on economic integration, we contribute to developing new forms of cooperation built on exchange of ideas, innovation and research. Science and culture are at the very core of the European openness: they enrich us as individuals and they create bonds beyond borders.

Humbled, and grateful for the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, there is no better place to share this vision than here in Norway, a country which has been giving so much to the cause of global peace.

The "*pacification of Europe*" was at the heart of Alfred Nobel's concerns. In an early version of his will, he even equated it to international peace.

This echoes the very first words of the Schuman Declaration, the founding document of the European Union. "*La paix mondiale*". "*World Peace*," it says, "*cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.*"

My message today is: you can count on our efforts to fight for lasting peace, freedom and justice in Europe and in the world.

Over the past sixty years, the European project has shown that it is possible for peoples and nations to come together across borders. That it is possible to overcome the differences between "them" and "us".

Here today, our hope, our commitment, is that, with all women and men of good will, the European Union will help the world come together.