



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Speech by President Barroso: "A new narrative for Europe"

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New narrative for Europe, BOZAR/Brussels
23 April 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by warmly thanking Paul Dujardin for his dedication and for hosting us in the BOZAR, in this beautiful Salle Henry Le Boeuf, where, as we said, we have the privilege not only of being in such a beautiful architectural setting, but also where some of the best music in the world has been and will continue to be played.

I would also like to thank Morten Løkkegaard, who played a key role in the birth of this project, and all the members of the Cultural Group that will steer it. And I will like to thank each one of you for your contributions so far. And of course contributions that I hope will continue.

I am delighted to see so many of you here for the launch of this new project for 'A new narrative for Europe'. Thank you so much for your commitment, thank you so much for your contributions to what I believe will be an important debate for the future of Europe and for Europeans.

But why, some may ask, a new narrative for Europe and why culture? Culture in the broad sense of the word, including for instance science as well.

A new narrative for Europe not because we don't remain loyal to the *raison d'être* of the European community and the European Union; of course this remains valid. But because I think we need, in the beginning of the XXI century, namely for the new generation that is not so much identified with this narrative of Europe, to continue to tell the story of Europe. Like a book: it cannot only stay in the first pages, even if the first pages were extremely beautiful. We have to continue our narrative, continue to write the book of the present and of the future. This is why we need a new narrative for Europe.

And the second reason: why culture? Precisely because Europe is not just about economy. It is about culture in the broad sense of the word, encompassing so many of the activities linked to knowledge. But I will come to that in a minute.

In fact the European Union is a unique political experiment; a project for change that was born and raised among the ruins of a demoralised and long divided continent.

Peace and the promotion of democracy, freedom and respect for human dignity, collective solidarity and individual responsibility lie at the heart of European integration.

Europe had to go through years of war and division before it was able to bring these values together. And this came about through the European community, later the European Union. A Union based on mutual consent rather than force that had been the rule - if I can use the word rule plugged to force - during so many centuries in Europe.

But European unity cannot be taken for granted. European unity, democracy and respect for human dignity have to be fought for every day.

And today the resurgence of populism, sometimes extreme nationalism, threatens to destroy the dream made real. And, let us be clear, the indifference of many pro-Europeans is also a risk.

We cannot allow such a pessimistic and destructive agenda to dictate our actions. This is all the more important as we must now adapt to the emergence of a new, highly competitive, highly interdependent world. This is a world where size matters, a world that thinks and acts on a continental scale. And the relation between those powers is so important.

We must, therefore, abandon the illusion that we can respond to European problems only with national solutions.

Yet at the same time we must never give up any of our values, our culture or our way of life, our European way of life.

Solidarity, social cohesion and the social market economy lie at the very heart of the European consensus. I believe they must be defended and preserved.

We must also recognise that, while our Europe arose 60 years ago from the reconciliation between long-standing enemies, it must now find a fresh impetus in a new rapprochement, by which I mean a coming together between the people of Europe and the European Union.

At a time when so many Europeans are faced with unemployment, uncertainty and in many cases growing inequality, the reality is that a sort of 'European fatigue' has set in, coupled with a lack of understanding. Who does what, who decides what, who controls whom and what? And where are we heading to? Anxiety questions. These are all questions that demand a clear answer. To be fair, they are not only European. Many of them, we see them also posed in other parts of the world where we see also some populist extremist trends coming up and I don't mean only the fundamentalist threats, but I mean also events in industrial societies like the United States, where we see also this kind of populism coming up. It is linked to the anxiety that arrived from change that is very fast and by globalisation trends. So, we need to have answers, because I also believe that we cannot have more sustainable European integration without more European democracy and we cannot have a more effective Europe without more European legitimacy.

The truth is that Europe is a daily reality for more than 500 million Europeans and yet the public opinion is fragmented mainly along national borders. This is the reality.

Which also means, that we must put an end to the aberration of dealing with European issues at the national level as if they were external or foreign policy issues. This is I think enough reasons to have the temptation to write a new narrative for Europe.

But why turn to the world of culture to develop a new narrative on Europe among other contributions of course?

Quite simply, because culture is a core value and a strong unifying element in European integration.

It is true that the genius of the founding fathers of our Union lay in, to quote the historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, 'merging together two simple ideas: supranationalism and concrete economic realities.'

But let us never forget that, from the outset, European integration has been much more than a simple economic integration project.

When, on 23 May 1950, Jean Monnet suggested, on behalf of the French Government and Robert Schuman, that Chancellor Adenauer join them in building Europe, the European Community, the Chancellor accepted with the following words: "We are not engaging in a purely material enterprise, we are engaging in a human enterprise which will promote peace and mark a major step forward for civilisation." There are at least three important words: human, meaning that it is not just about economy; civilisation, meaning that it is about culture; and peace, meaning that at the end there is an overall political project. We were so proud to receive last year the Nobel Prize for peace and when I had the privilege, on behalf of the European Union, to give the Nobel lecture, I made this point – that Europe is also a project of culture and science and that precisely, this is linked from the beginning of the European community to the Eastern European integration.

So, there is no clearer demonstration that the European Union is fundamentally a political and cultural project based on strong humanist values.

The fact is that the tapestry of European history, the rich diversity of European culture and Europe's reserves of creativity are some of the strongest cards we hold when it comes to building a prosperous European future.

It is with new ideas, new concepts and new projects that we will rise to the challenges facing us to make our future a reality.

And that's why the European Commission defends a Europe that invests in culture, in education, in research and innovation. These are investments in future growth, jobs and social cohesion.

Europe also turns to you and colleagues of yours because nobody can tell our story as well as you can. You can trace our common roots and bear witness to our common cultural identity which transcends our linguistic diversity.

Europe calls on you because we cannot let people think that Europe is technocratic or bureaucratic. Europe has a soul, and that soul is its civilisation in all its rich creativity, its unity in diversity and, even, its contradictions.

In a word, Europe needs you and your ideas, your creativity to realise its full potential as a project in which every citizen is an actor.

The truth is that if we are to unite we need common rules and institutions, but we won't have real unity until we acknowledge a sense of belonging to a community which is bigger than the nation or the region, a sense of a shared European destiny which we are ready to work together to achieve.

Europe needs also your talent to tell our story, to perpetuate our collective memory and to articulate this destiny which we all share.

By bearing witness you will help young people in Europe who are fortunate enough not to have lived through war or dictatorship to identify with this common narrative. By bearing witness, you'll help them understand that nothing in life is guaranteed and that we must be constantly on our guard to avoid repeating past errors.

You will also ensure that this younger generation, now turning the page from a vanished age to a future which has yet to be invented, is aware that the European Union, as it faces globalisation, is more necessary than ever.

Telling Europe a new narrative will ensure that our citizens are inspired by the great achievements of European culture which are our best assets to rise to the challenges of the 21st century. And that applies not just to our commitment to education, research, innovation and environmental protection but also to our solidarity with all those throughout the world who are struggling for those universal values which are so dear to us and on which we have built our community and our Union.

And for that to happen Europe does not just need to give hope to people in Europe, it also needs all their energy and all their hopes.

That, in a nutshell, is the purpose of today's event and the General assembly of culture and thinking on Europe, this process that we are now launching; to speak and to listen in order to prepare a new narrative for Europe together; for our Union in the 21st century, an Union proud of its values and its achievements, open to changes, open to criticism and also confident in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.

Let the debate begin!