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The Identity and the Unity of Europe

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The Identity and the Unity of Europe

Lecture by

C.A. Ciampi

President of the Republic of Italy
at the Universiteit Leiden

Including the welcoming speech of A.W. Kist,
President of the Universiteit Leiden

5 March 2003

On March 4 and 5, 2003, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Italy and Mrs. Ciampi paid an official visit to the Netherlands, hosted by Her Majesty the Queen. The President and Mrs. Ciampi visited Universiteit Leiden, accompanied by Her Royal Highness Princess Máxima, on March 5.

The President delivered a lecture in the Groot Auditorium of the Academy Building and met with teachers and students from Leiden as well as the Universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam in the Senate Room.

Welcome speech by A.W. Kist

Your Excellency
Mrs. Ciampi
Your Royal Highness
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have come to this University to share with us your views on the future of Europe, about the developments in the European Convention. Your words will reach beyond this great hall. They will be aimed at a larger audience, at the Members and Candidate Members of the European Union and their citizens.

The academic community of the Netherlands experiences it as an honour that you nevertheless opted for this University Hall, and Leiden University regards it as a privilege to represent this community.

The European academic community and ‘Europe’ as an idea and as a unity, have been intimately connected from the Middle Ages, and share, in fact, the same source. In the twelfth century Europe may have been a collection of regions, principalities and city-states, the universities, with the famous universities of Bologna and Paris as the oldest examples, possessed an enormous attraction beyond their regions. To use a present-day EU expression: there was free mobility of students and staff.

The rise and flourishing of those universities contributed greatly to the establishment, around 1300, of Europe as a cultural identity, for they produced a homogeneous bureaucratic and cultural elite that –in the literal and figurative sense– shared the same language. In this respect, universities have paved the way for ‘Europe’. In our time –particularly in this century– university education increasingly crosses borders. It goes without saying that top-level research by definition has an international orientation. It is also evident that a prosperous Europe and a flourishing academic life are interdependent and mutually enforcing factors.

In 1946, just after World War II, it was Sir Winston Churchill who openly and to the full extent raised the issue of the necessity for Europe to unite. In a historic speech, he advocated a sort of 'United States of Europe'. This groundbreaking address was not delivered in, for instance, the House of Commons, but at the University of Zurich, and is known as his 'Speech to the Academic Youth'. Our university is equally proud to be a platform for generating ideas about Europe's future today.

Except offering a platform, universities also in these days may be the trailblazers for the Europe of the future. Through internationalisation of education and the free movement of students among member states and between member states and candidate countries, a generation of people may be raised that understand each other, and to whom 'Europe' is a self-evident reality.

Both in education and in research, universities are dedicated to raising that new generation that profits from new knowledge and understanding, and takes it up. That, not disregarding all differences, is what universities have in common with the statesmen who within and around the European Convention are concerned with the future of Europe, with the future of that and following generations. With them, we are very anxious to hear what you, as an eminent representative of your country that with good reason hosts the European University, have to say about the future of Europe, our future.

It is my pleasure to invite you to take the floor.

Lecture by C.A. Ciampi

The Identity and the Unity of Europe

Your Royal Highness
Distinguished Minister
Distinguished President of the University
Distinguished Rector
Dear Students
Ladies and Gentlemen

I should like first of all to pay tribute to the ideal of civil and religious freedom of which the Leiden University stands as a symbol: it is a source of pride for the Netherlands and for Europe.

For at this University the foundations of the doctrine that placed human rights at the heart of history were laid, enabling us to develop the conviction that institutions and law help humanity build up the future with confidence.

Anchored by her culture and flourishing trade to the other major economic and intellectual centres in Europe, and thanks to her kinship with the experience of the Italian Communes and Maritime Republics, the Netherlands reached out to the furthest corners of the earth.

Today, this vocation is being renewed by her active participation in upholding and ensuring the success of the three bulwarks of the international order: the European Union, NATO and the United Nations. They would never have seen the light of day without the decisive contribution of the nations in which democracy has flourished.

Differences have surfaced in Europe in the past few weeks, they should not lead us to hasty conclusions. We must, however, reflect seriously on what has happened. Despite the unanimous agreement on important documents, such as the conclusions of the European Council of 17th February, divergences have emerged which have weakened Europe's influence.

We must be strongly committed to ensuring that similar situations cannot be repeated in future.

The European Union has always managed to heal splits and divisions. It is driven to do so by its awareness of both the soundness of the path it undertook in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the need to continue making progress along it. If we were to stop, we would run the risk of backsliding.

The European Union is an experience without precedent in the history of the continent and of the international community. It is the result of the choice taken by free peoples who identify with common aims and values, and who are organising themselves in pursuit of them.

We have been successful whenever European integration has moved forward. We have paid a price whenever we have been hesitant.

There is an increasingly more intense and deeply-felt expectation on the part of the citizens of Europe to acquire a complete identity, and hear Europe speaking out more loudly on the world stage.

I am addressing the younger generation above all: the drive of their idealism is the best guarantee for the future of Europe. I should like to remind the youth of Leiden and all their contemporaries - in the Netherlands and in Italy - that the six Founding Members of the European Community intentionally started out half a century ago along an innovative path. They bound themselves to a unique experience, and ever since then they have preserved and shared its original spirit.

The expectations raised then have since been met:

- peace, prosperity and solidarity are now facts of life;
- national borders have been abolished, and the single market and the euro have consolidated a vast common material and spiritual area;
- progress is now being made to extend and more deeply entrench the transparency, democratic legitimacy and efficiency of our institutions;
- further progress is within our grasp to better guarantee internal security and to coordinate the economy more closely, in order to complete the single market, and to develop an authentic foreign policy based on the identification and pursuit of common interests.

Our success has been due to the fact that from the outset, we immediately and courageously chose to move in the right direction. We refused to be intimidated by the ghosts of the past or by our daring innovations.

With the institution of the ECSC in 1950 we focused on the principle of shared sovereignty, on overcoming the mechanism of traditional alliances, and took our inspiration from federalism.

The citizens of Europe understood that the time had come to be innovative in relations between States which had become destructive in the last century and were sidelining Europe on the world stage.

Europe is identified by the awareness that the Union is a more advanced model than a traditional alliance based on international law.

This model has created an interdependency without precedent between the European States. It has marked the move from international law to European constitutional law. The Convention on the future of Europe is bound to take note of this radical change. We have always rejected the choice between the *Bundesstaat* and the *Staatenbund*; we have always operated through a wise combination of intergovernmental cooperation and supranationality.

The European Convention has the task of advancing European unity and identity: we must confidently follow and support its activity.

The citizens of Europe, with their mature judgement, understand that a new and permanent configuration is essential for a Europe with 25 members which can no longer be postponed; European public opinion knows that this creative work must be protected, in the interests of all, from external upheavals, however serious they may be. Only a European Constitution or a Constitutional Treaty, capable of creating harmony between the institutions and making them fully functional, can give them the credibility and efficiency they need. And give Europe the dignity and the role of a leading player on the international stage.

There is no doubt that with the confidence and hope which carries us forward we must never underestimate the difficulties and the contingent events that lie ahead. We must pre-empt them.

If the Community method, which is based on a mature understanding of the problems in the light of Europe's common interests and on timely decision-taking, were to stall, or if the indications of the objectives being pursued were to become a purely routine reference, then we, who feel that we are European citizens, would make a negative contribution to the consolidation of the international order.

Distinguished Rector

Since the days of Herodotus it has not been possible to establish the borders of Europe geographically, because Europe has no natural borders.

Yet the concept of Europe has become gradually ingrained across the centuries: it has grown in strength, and survived the harshest vicissitudes.

The essence of European unity derives from a common way of feeling, thinking and desiring that has developed throughout the course of the history of our continent. It is rooted in our common classical and Christian heritage, which has fashioned the look of our cities and our countrysides, making them economically and culturally complementary across the centuries. It even remained intact when Europeans fell prey to the blandishments of sterile destructive conflict.

Indeed, the dramatic wars of the 20th century gave the peoples of Europe the will to organise themselves to live in peace together, so that they could share a common destiny.

In the past, we shared a visible kinship, nourished by the great schools of thought of the Humanists for whom Europe was one large area for exchanging, drawing on the wealth of our common cultural heritage. Today, this kinship is fostered by the naturalness with which our young people travel the length and breadth of the Union, breaking down or straddling, with generous, disinterested friendship, the psychological barriers that had once seemed insurmountable.

The borders based on Europe's ideals have now taken shape; they are defined by our joint membership of a community of nations, rich in their individuality, traditions and memories, sharing a common cultural heritage whose individual components only feel fully protected within a unitary context, solidly underpinned by our confidence in democracy, and our respect for the dignity of the human person.

Ours was not the first generation to speak about the political unity, and hence the identity, of Europe which constitutes its historical and cultural basis. After the unifying force of the Roman and Latin civilisation waned, Europe was frequently tempted during the centuries that followed: by the political genius of individuals, by the impositions of brute force.

But they were never to become complete constructions. The tragedies of the 20th century, the vision of the abyss caused by fratricidal wars and totalitarianism finally unleashed, and matured, the consciences of the Europeans. They consolidated their membership of a shared area of common rights and duties, and chased out into the darkness the spectres of nationalism, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Our common historical legacy, the awareness of possessing a European identity, our membership of a single value system, the principle of shared sovereignty mark out European citizenship and identify the European Union; they underpin its institutional, political and economic scaffolding.

But this is precisely the challenge that faces us.

We must be capable of backing up the principles we intend to use as the basis for our life in common with appropriate forms and rules of governance.

There spring spontaneously to my mind the words I hold dear, with which an Italian patriot, Vincenzo Cuoco, closed his book on the 1799 Neapolitan revolution in which he personally took part: *For the happiness of peoples, the institutions are more important than the people.*

Our fellow citizens, who will be called to elect our representatives to the European Parliament in the spring of 2004, are entitled to be offered a definitive choice, a clear political project. Otherwise, the authority of the European Parliament itself will be in jeopardy.

If the aim of successfully and rapidly concluding the Convention and the Intergovernmental Conference is not achieved, there is a risk that interminable negotiations, partisan sectoral interests and centrifugal forces will gain the upper hand.

The process that has begun to define the new institutions and, at the same time, complete enlargement is complex.

Its timing is constrained by the decisions we have already taken.

When we embarked on enlargement, we were fully aware that we had to immediately set about modifying the institutions. It is impossible to further delay what we should have done when the enlargements took place in the Eighties and Nineties.

The European Union cannot pause.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the present institutional structure does not permit the Union to draw the European train along at the required speed and with the necessary degree of safety. We are all damaged by it.

Distinguished Rector
Ladies and Gentlemen

Almost five centuries have passed since the genius and farsightedness of Grotius irreversibly innovated the view of the world and relations between States.

His vision of an international community governed by common rules and by the rule of law rather than by arbitrary force began at Leiden, and in 1945 culminated at San Francisco after having attracted the enlightened contributions of generations of thinkers, philosophers and statesmen in Europe and in the community of values and ideas taking shape across the Atlantic.

The peoples of Europe acquired a genuine historical awareness when they rejected the fruitless clash of national interests, and opted to work together to build a project for stability, democracy and prosperity, which is now the European Union.

But they certainly did not reject the anarchy of their own relations in order to rediscover it in their international relations: this is the reason why Europe believes in the multilateral organisations as an instrument for expressing the will of us all, and why it supports their efforts.

European integration stemmed from the same convictions that inspired and have underpinned the great multilateral institutions: it came into being in the wake of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions. It came into being as a result of confidence in an international community built on principles, on responsibilities accepted by all, and on rules.

The multilateral system is a recent achievement of humanity, which is still currently being constructed and painstakingly improved. In the world of economic and financial interdependence, of instantaneous communications and of ongoing dialogue between cultures and nations, the multilateral system is a necessity.

The 21st century cannot do without it.

The multilateral system has overcome the “cold war” divisions. It has gained strength; it has taken on new responsibilities which it must exercise to eradicate poverty, protect human rights, and eliminate worldwide threats.

It cannot mark time. Safeguarding peace is its paramount objective.

If the international community were to renounce this, it would slide into chaos.

Faced with challenges of such enormous complexity, it is essential to remember that close cooperation between both sides of the Atlantic is not merely due to passing interests or tactical alliances. It is the result of having created a community of ideas and civilisation, built up in the centuries of the modern age. The cultures and the peoples of Italy and the Netherlands have played no small part in creating this community.

Differences exist in the trans-Atlantic relationship, and difficulties and misunderstandings, sometimes serious ones, may arise at times, but they will always be a passing phase. For essential values on which that relationship is based - democracy, freedom, respect for the human person, the rule of law, the market economy - remain paramount, because they are essential bases for both Europe and America.

There can be no contradiction between the two, based as they are on the same principles, striving to attain the same objectives.

Europe intends to act decisively against terrorism and against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This is confirmed by the participation of both our countries, together with many other partners and allies, in the efforts to liberate and re-establish security in Afghanistan.

But Europe also knows that the time has come to renew our confidence in the United Nations system and in the multilateral institutions. We look to them and to their rules as a response to the challenges and risks that are besetting us, resorting to the use of force when there are no viable alternatives, and at all times in compliance with the United Nations Charter.

We should never lose sight of the aim of preserving the unity and cohesion of the international community, in which Europe is an essential model and an element of stability.

European integration is not only important for our continent. It is a vital component and a pillar upholding the international order. With a united Europe the world is safer, more prosperous, freer, and more stable.

Once the European Union is endowed with legal personality, and a complete institutional system, it will be able to play a far more prominent role in the world. United, not divided; capable of reaching out to the international community bearing an authentic European interest, and not animated only by the oxygen which governments allow it, from time to time.

The time has come, my dear Netherlands friends, to deploy all the capacities of the European Union and to take on our responsibilities. I know that I share with you the certainty that we have always believed in the same objectives, values and convictions.

Our hearts and minds have remained unchanged from the day we took the first steps together towards European integration, in the years scarred by the hideous wounds of the Second World War, enlightened by an insight that we now wish to see fully transformed into a lasting reality in the 21st century.