

Professor Danuta Hübner
European Parliament

Europe as an "elective affinity"

30 Years of German Reunification

EU Hessen Representation, Brussels

18th November, 2020

First of all, thank you very much for the invitation to this celebration of one of the most important event in modern European history. Now, 30 years past since those momentous happening.

A new generation has arose. They do not even remember that there were 2 Geman states. And I can imagine that people who place a great value on historical remembrance are not happy about it. But this is a natural way of things and we have to accept that with years passing, for most people only a unified Germany will be an obvious point of reference.

Sometimes the best homage that we can pay to the past is, in Milan Kundera's spirit, forgetting it. I think that what we celebrate now is not limited to the very moment of unification.

What we celebrate is the vibrancy and dynamism of modern Germany, its people, their democratic commitment, their strong proEuropean stand, their moral backbone in confronting the challenges of our time. In a way we respect the memory, but we celebrate what is now. There are examples of political forces concentrated on memory only.

There are governments that end up with a sort of a false" historical policy", that in principle is confrontational and based on nationalistic ideas about nations as eternal rivals. Germany itself is at the forefront of the struggle against such toxic understanding of history. I have always appreciated it.

Nobody probably understand it better than Chancellor Angela Merkel, who with every word and every gesture show how she is aware of often painful history of Europe and of Germany, but also how she is resilient to temptations of abuse of history for the nefarious political ends. The integration of our continent, of which the German reunification was a triumphant act, is often seen as a miracle of history.

And let me bring here what German Chancellor said in 2011, in my home country, in Gdansk. She said: "This is however a strange miracle. It didn't happen by itself. Many of us worked hard to make it happen. This miracle today does not seem to be appreciated by many."

She also said: "Also relations between our two countries sometimes seem to be more about memory, and less about the future. Variable winds and bad storms come and go. We must be prepared that they can always return. That is why we must be together in taking care of Europe and of the community of values we share".

Europe is indeed, what should be the theme of this 30. Anniversary. Because a stronger Europe is an offspring of the reunited Germany. There was a Swiss writer, Denis de Rougemont, a federalist who said many years ago: "The point is not to foresee the future, but to create it".

Indeed, Europe of tomorrow will not just happen, it will have to be created. It is up to all of us who care for Europe to spare no efforts to make Europe a working democracy. We have a solid base to build Europe a new. And to do it we must reach out to citizens. We must listen to their concerns but also to their dreams. Europe is for the citizens and by the citizens.

It was also the European citizens who overthrew the Berlin Wall. I always believed that this has been done for freedom of Germany and for freedom of Europe.

But de Rougement had a second passion, in addition to Europe. It was the idea of love. You must love what you build – he said. For many of us, in our big or small nation-states, Europe is a marriage of convenience, at best a mindset but there is no emotion.

Love is far too often lacking.

Perhaps this is why we find it so difficult to present a convincing case for deeper integration, where many and diverse countries come together and achieve common goals, while preserving the diversity.

In one way Europe 'unconsciously' already 'is', but in the other way it is still dormant, waiting to be appropriated as a political project. Every generation has the right and duty to rediscover their Europe.

Today this "rediscovering" of Europe anew will enable us to confront the populist movements that are, in their deep mythology, based on false identitarian claims, nationalist impulses and racism.

These are some thoughts I wanted to share with you on this occasion which is important for all of us Europeans. But my last word is about Johan Wolfgang Goethe.

I must admit, I discovered quite late that he was not only a poet. He wrote a novel. Its title is "Elective Affinities". Europe is an "elective affinity". You cannot become a European against your wish. But you have to choose it not only with your passport but also with your heart. And when I look at you, German people 30 years after you have become one nation again, and at what you have been doing so far, I think you have been doing exactly this – choosing Europe with your heart.

Thank you for this.