

Aachen, 20 May 2004

Address by Pat COX on receiving the Charlemagne Prize for 2004

Ober Bürgermeister, President, Commissioner (s), Your Excellencies, Fellow members of the European Parliament, My fellow Europeans,

I am deeply honoured, personally and on behalf of the European Parliament, to receive this year's Charlemagne Prize - a citizens' prize from the people of Aachen in recognition of the citizens' parliament of the European Union.

For almost two millennia, Aachen as a city has expressed continuity at the heart of Europe, just as in recent decades the Charlemagne prize has expressed your dedication and fidelity to the cause of European integration and reconciliation. In this year of all years the prize carries a special resonance. This is the year of the reunification of our continent with the enlargement of the European Union. Politically, this is the year of Europe's first constitutional treaty.

This is the year of the sixth direct elections to the European Parliament, but the first on a truly continental scale.

In short this is a year of unparalleled European renewal and re-definition. In the European Parliament we deeply appreciate your act of recognition of what we do through the Charlemagne prize.

I am honoured to receive the award in a place so redolent of European history, a monument to the continuity of culture, learning, tradition and of Europe itself. In the Cathedral chapel here today, I saw a dedication.

It reads in latin: CUM LAPIDES VIVI PACIS CONPAGE LIGANTUR ... CLARET OPUS - "since the living stones have been joined in peaceful harmony.. this hall will shine brightly". This shrine to an early flowering of the European ideal is a fitting and appropriate setting for the year when a reunited and reconciling Europe has finally buried the ghosts of its past.

With extraordinary foresight, Robert Schuman foresaw the dawning of the new Europe when he wrote in 1963 of the painful, ideological division that had cut Europe in two :

"Elle a été imposée par la violence. Puisse-t-elle s'effacer dans la liberté!".

On 1 May this year, freedom won!, "La liberte a gagné" , Schuman's appeal was heard and Europe is no longer cut in two. Today's generation of Europeans has taken up the torch of reconciliation and peace from the founding fathers.

Enlargement is undoubtedly a cause for celebration but it also brings us to a new European cross-roads, challenging us to discover and realise our full and true potential.

As we seek out the right path for Europe's future, we can draw inspiration from those leaders who, in Western Europe after the Second World War, had the courage and vision to act strategically for Europe.

People like Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Paul-Henri Spaak, Alcide De Gasperi - all Charlemagne Prize laureates, in whose company, I am bound to tell you, I feel humbled.

Our generation is called upon to think and act no less strategically than theirs, to provide determined leadership, to earn the consent of our peoples and to create new harmonies to bring Europe forward together. For earlier generations of Europeans who had survived and lived through the dreadful alternatives, their permissive consent was available to the Europe of peace and reconciliation.

At a time when past achievement and current freedoms are so easily discounted by public opinion we

cannot take future public consent for granted. It must be earned. We need to concentrate on essentials. We need to focus on delivery. We need to communicate our public purpose in plain but meaningful terms.

In accordance with the treaties we have successfully Europeanised many aspects of European public policy but without yet Europeanising politics itself.

To do this we need more deeply to embrace the parliamentary way not just at the European level but also at the national and constitutional regional levels.

Constitutional Treaty

To achieve this goal we need the constitutional treaty. On behalf of the European Parliament, I call today upon European leaders to deliver our new constitutional settlement as quickly as possible and in terms that are both coherent and effective.

Agreeing the Constitutional Treaty (so thoroughly prepared by the Convention, ably led by President Giscard d'Estaing) will, in the clearest way, give the lie to those who fear that a new European Union of twenty-five and more cannot work. The constitution will be the surest guarantee that our continent's new unity of purpose can yield rich dividends for our peoples.

Agreeing the Constitutional Treaty will permit us to pass from a decade and more of endless introspection on issues of institutional design and process to real political issues of substance and their delivery by focusing on the essentials.

Agreeing the Constitutional Treaty will help tomorrow's European Union to be more efficient, more transparent and more democratic.

It is a project whose time has come and so my message to our European leaders is the time to deliver is now.

European Parliament

The Constitutional Treaty will enhance the role of the European Parliament in the democratic life of the European Union. In just over three week's time the sixth direct elections to the European Parliament will be held in the twenty five Member States of the Union.

Today the European Parliament is an efficient law maker, a prudent budget authority, the European Union's public and open platform for executive accountability, an authorising environment for executive action and a citizen-friendly tribune for the peoples of Europe.

The European Parliament is a hardworking institution which rightly has earned a respected place in the Union's decision making process. It deserves but also is challenged now to find an equivalent respect in the hearts and minds of the peoples of Europe for the indispensable democratic input which it makes on their behalf.

The constitution also foresees a new role for national parliaments and national parliamentarians who are called upon to contribute politically to the new Europe by exercising vigilance on the Union's respect for the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality when it proposes to act. This proposition has the full support of the European Parliament.

Together this enhanced role for parliamentary democracy can offer tomorrow's Europe more legitimacy, more transparency and more accountability.

The core mission of Europe

The constitutional treaty will spell out more clearly than ever before who does what in the European Union. It will allow us to concentrate properly on the essentials, on Europe's core missions. While considerable progress has been made across many fronts, we need in more areas of public policy to move from laudable statements of best intention to practical results. Europe needs to move from design to delivery. Too often there are gaps between our policy aspirations and our capacity and

political willingness to act. These must be addressed to avoid delivery gaps becoming credibility gaps.

Concentrating on essentials and focussing on delivery are core tasks for the next European Commission and European Parliament. These will be greatly facilitated by a renewed emphasis on communicating Europe's public purpose in plain language. Many commentators see the first European Commission of twenty-five members as problematic in its scale. In fact its size carries new opportunities.

These extra human and political resources can be harnessed and mobilised not just for the leadership tasks of managing and delivering the European Union's complex agenda but also as a platform for enhanced communications. This is especially the case with national parliaments where a greater and more frequent Commission presence, especially with specialised Committees, could yield significant returns in explaining and communicating the Europe's added value and public purpose.

Above all, in communicating to the wider public and in our campaigning we need to talk about a Europe that has real meaning.

We need to talk about the Europe of values and not to confine ourselves solely to the sterility of a Europe of markets or the intricacies of the Common Agricultural Policy, indispensable as these may be. We must talk to people about our belief in pluralist democracy and its centrality to the European project. It is no accident that Greece joined the EU after the Colonels, Spain after Franco, Portugal after Salazar and the states of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

We must explain to people about our commitment to the promotion of human rights and our respect for the rule of law. In our troubled world of today we must insist that prisoners of war have full rights under the Geneva Convention.

We in the European Parliament are proud that Europe has led the way on the establishment of the International Criminal Court in the fight for international human rights. We would prefer, any day the due process of an International Criminal Court to its absence in Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere.

We in the European Parliament are proud of the leadership that Europe has given in the challenge of sustainable development and of Europe's leadership in seeking the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

We are proud in the European Parliament of our solidarity and our cohesion with each other in the European Union and between the European Union and the wider world.

The European Union and its Member States today constitute the largest donor community of untied aid to the poorest countries on earth. We could do more.

We recognise and promote cultural diversity as a cornerstone of contemporary European integration. We realise in a Europe of united states that by sharing key decisions, state by state, people by people, we can be more effectively what we want to be, while being no less who we are.

To realise our full potential together we must not shirk from drawing the lessons for the future from the failures of the past. Never again should Europe have a "Srebrenica" on its conscience. The hurricanes of hatred that reaped their bitter harvest there in July 1995 could have been halted if we as their neighbours had the capacity and the resolve to act. We must find both.

The European Union arguably has been the world's most successful and sustained example of conflict resolution through a dense network of binding treaties and political institutions. We have created a new European way. We must not be shy about its fullest expression on a multilateral global stage.

This values based agenda obliges us to emphasise the discovery and building of new European harmonies together. This is the new horizon. This is the step beyond the Europe of harmonisation. Fortified by strong values, focussed on clear interests, enabled by greater capacity to act, enhanced by common political will and vision, I am confident that the new Europe can meet the global challenges of the twenty-first century.

Ireland

I am particularly proud to be the first Irish European to receive the Charlemagne prize.

The Ireland of my childhood just a few decades ago boasted political independence but economically was almost totally dependent on its former colonial power, the United Kingdom. In effect Ireland was the poorest region of the wider British economy. As a people we gave up our young to emigration breaking the hearts of our families and the backs of our communities. It diminished our sense of who we were.

In 1973 Ireland joined the European Economic Community as its poorest member state. So much as changed and changed positively in the past three decades.

The creative exploitation of Irish sovereign independence was the moment when through pooling some of our sovereignty we added real value to our small state's influence. It was this choice that paved our way for the transformation that brought us from stagnation to opportunity and achievement, from being a failed entity in a regional economy to being a competitive player on the global market. I share this story with you in Aachen because ours is a story of European success and a message of hope for others.

Robert Schuman once wrote that an Irish saint, Saint Columbanus, was "the patron saint of those who seek to construct a united Europe".

I recall this story too because in the sixth century and early part of the seventh century this abbot, poet, scholar and preacher - not the only Irish one to so do -co-founded western monasticism in early medieval Europe. He travelled in the countries of Charlemagne's Europe among the Franks, the Swabians and the Lombards.

His remains today lie and are celebrated still in Bobbio in Italy, where I made a personal pilgrimage some few weeks ago.

One thousand four hundred years ago this early Irish European in a letter exhorting the Pope to "arise from his sleep" described the Irish as 'ultimi habitatores mundi', -the inhabitants of the edge of the World.

My standing before you as the elected President of the European Parliament representing that 'edge of the World' of which Columbanus wrote carries another message for the wider Europe, namely that the heart of European democracy is open to all irrespective of size.

Today in Aachen, a cradle of European unity, we have much to celebrate: the year of enlargement, the constitutional Treaty, the European elections leading to a new Parliament and a new Commission - all adding up to a new perspective for Europe's development.

As Konrad Adenauer once said:

Die Einheit Europas war ein Traum von Wenigen. Sie wurde eine Hoffnung für viele. Sie ist heute eine Notwendigkeit für uns alle" (European Unity was a dream for a few. it was a hope for many. Today it is a necessity for all)...

Den Bürgern der Stadt Aachen spreche ich für diese Ehrung meinen tiefsten Dank aus (to the people and the city of Aachen for the honour which you have bestowed on me, my thanks)