

Herrhausen Gesellschaft

Conference "Europe : dream and reality"
Berlin 09/05/2014

PL Remarks

Do Europeans need to share a dream? Yes, I think so

Can Europeans share a dream? Yes, I believe so.

I also believe we should be better at making this dream come true, and that we can only do that together.

To start with, let's face the political reality: support for European integration in public opinions has quite dramatically declined during the last decade. Roughly by half. Partly as a consequence of the financial crisis. Understandably, economic and social difficulties make the most hardly hit angry. The European reaction to the shock that came from the US was perceived, rightly or wrongly as slow, messy and disciplinary.

But this is not the only explanation. There is a deeper problem which is getting bigger as time passes: the initial powerful narrative that used to generate approval among citizens has faded away. In many ways, what bound the previous generations of Europeans, the common spirit they had, was not a dream, but a nightmare, that of a repetition of horrors of the past.

This nightmare is gone. Great, in many ways. But, then, why do we need to keep building a new common political space? What binds us which we care about, which we feel is essential enough to accept compromises that anthropologists tell us change fundamentally our relationship to power and legitimacy, to polity?

I have been travelling around this planet for the last 30 years and my answer to this question stems from my own experience: what binds us together is our identity. As we all know, identity is both about sameness and about difference. And the reality is that non Europeans have a much clearer view of European identity than European themselves. As Mely Kiyak wrote, and I love it because it says it all: " Europe is Europe's biggest secret".

Our world, which is transforming full speed in the gales of globalization, is full of challenges and opportunities. Poverty reduction and increasing inequalities. Better lives overall but Nature suffering. Much more knowledge but little more awareness. Humans hold the balance between chances and risks in their hands. We need to harness this globalization in the right direction. And the difference between right and wrong has to do with values.

Values, in my view, are what bind Europeans, what define European-ness, what lie behind what Bundesminister Steinmeier called earlier today: the European model. The European way of life which, he said, his interlocutors envy. We have heard this many times today : Europe is a dream for others. A specific mix of individualism and social cohesion, of competition and solidarity, of attention to nature and to culture. Less tolerance to inequalities than in America. More individual freedom than in China. In other words, a more civilized place. Europe as a role model of a civilized globalization. A good friend of mine, well known I am sure to many of you, Patrick Aebischer, the President of the École Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne, has been very successful at recruiting a good number of the best scientific world brains in some areas. I asked him recently what was his trick and his answer was: "I pick up my phone, I call them, and I tell them: I have an offer for you. You will be paid the US rate and you will live in Europe. And it works!"

Which leads me to my final point: yes, this civilized option of globalization has a price

Less tolerance to inequality, more attention to inclusiveness, more care for the environment implies sophisticated collective systems that economic activity can sustain.

As the German Chancellor often says: "Europe is 7% of the world population, 20% of the world production and 50% of the world social expenditure". This means that our European identity is not a given. We need to work for it, to build it, to improve it. If this becomes our "new dream", as there was once a "new deal", and I believe it can be a powerful one, then let's do what it takes to make it true.

My view is that this is doable, at one condition. None of our nations will be able to sustain this option, this identity alone in a world of elephants. If we want to influence globalization, to harness it in the right direction for mankind, the only possible way is to do it together. And this is where the passion of dreams meets with the reasons to act: We need the **passion** for our values, and the **reason** to understand that we will only get there united.