

**Address of Professor Andrea Riccardi  
Charlemagne Prize 2009**

*Aachen, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2009*

Dear Mayor, please allow me to speak in my own tongue, which is also the language of the Count of Cavour. I thank all those who have gathered here in Aachen today for this celebration and this unforgettable day. I must of course mention Their Royal Highnesses, the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, the President of the European Parliament, the Minister of Health and Minister of Cooperation of the Federal Republic, the President of the Land, the ambassadors, and particularly the Italian ambassador, Mr Antonio Puri Purini, the religious authorities, the Cardinal, and above all the friends who have come from all over Europe to take part in this celebration, the friends of the Community of Sant'Egidio coming from many parts of Europe, the President of the Community of Sant'Egidio.

I am honoured and touched in receiving this Prize, which makes me the fiftieth of a prestigious list of prize-winners. I thank the Board of Directors of the Charlemagne Prize and its President for the honour they bestowed upon me, but – and it was the sense of the *laudatio* – I believe this honour is given especially to the Community of Sant'Egidio. I am grateful for the insightful and affectionate words of my great friend, Michel Camdessus, and I thank him, and I thank very much Mr Pat Cox for his generous, rich and incisive *laudatio*.

It is an honour for me to receive a European Prize, in a city crossroads of encounter, a symbol of dialogue between different people. Bishop Mussinghoff, whom I greet with affection and profound friendship, celebrated here a great meeting among religions in the spirit of peace. At the time I understood that the spirit of Aachen is a European spirit, a spirit of peace and unity. And at the time I understood that the spirit of Aachen and the spirit of Assisi walk side by side.

The Prize Committee did not select a politician, as it usually does. I question myself regarding the reasons for this choice. Since 1949, from its foundation, the Prize is inspired by “freedom, humanism, and peace”. The prize-winners include Alcide De Gasperi, my great fellow countryman, the founder of the Italian democracy, a man of faith and of great dreams in the dark years of fascism and war. Having become the leader of a new Italy, he did not give up dreaming. He believed that freedom and peace would be ensured only by a united Europe. For him, as well as for the other founders, Europe was *ananké*, in Greek, a necessity, a historical destiny.

United Europe was a historical destiny for people who had been through the tragedy of war. A European war had once again set fire to the world. Europe could no longer be allowed to destroy herself, nor to destroy the world. The dream of unity was born out of rejection of war, of a mere national vision of politics. It was born out of the need of something radically new. The rationale of national politics was no longer enough in front of the inconceivable truth of the Shoah. And in remembering that tragedy I bow to another prize-winner, Mrs Simone Weil, who bore witness to those tragic events, and to great hope; and I remember dear Rabbi Brodman.

Then the dream of a great history began. Unity as *ananké*, unity as a historical necessity. Dear friends, does Europe, a much richer Europe, richer than in the post-war period, when 60% of this city was destroyed and this building no longer existed, does this Europe still feel that same necessity?

There is a dangerous inclination to localism, to fragmentation. There is fear of Europe, among people who feel dispossessed in a globalised world. People are afraid that Europe may force its models upon

them. There is disaffection with institutions that appear remote and distant, even though we are at the vigil of European elections. Europe is fine, but like an apartment block, that ignores the pressure of history. Europe, not as a passion or a dream, but as a remote background for national and local politics. Dear friends, we cannot only condemn these attitudes, we need to understand them: men and women who feel lost in a globalised world take shelter in their *heimat*.

But our *heimat* will not last long without Europe. Small steps are not enough, without the taste for Europe, without the capability to communicate with and to the citizens. We are imprisoned in tabloid news, in our national debates that are shouted one day and quickly forgotten the day after. All this is not history, it is only tabloid news. Does Europe still write history or does it just scribble a few pages of tabloid news?

Geremek, the great Polish historian and a dear friend of mine, used to say, "history is a mixture of science and poetry". The European destiny must become the poetry that inspires our future. That is how history is made. De Gasperi, a realist, was a passionate European dreamer.

Let us not be deceived! Even though it may not seem so, we stand before a dramatic choice, that will mark the next century for Europe. In lack of a unitary vision, we shall bid that farewell to history that Benedict XVI spoke of. We will be the prisoners of tabloid news, filling the papers and TV-screens, not the pages of history. Europe indeed will run the risk of retiring from history.

The impact of globalisation, of India, of China, of rising civilisations, economies and demographics, cannot be withstood by our individual countries alone. Unless we are together, European countries will be a *quantité négligeable*. Our values and identities will then be diluted by the currents of globalisation. And it will be a loss for the world, as well as for civilisation as a whole. Navigating in global history as a disunited Europe is an illusion. Without true European unity, there will be no European countries in the world. We shall preserve the memory of ancient powers, glorious and inglorious pages, but gone. The values of peace, liberty and humanism of Europe will be lost, unless Europe is united.

This vision, during this beautiful celebration and in this welcoming city, a city that seems fit for a Mediterranean welcome, may seem catastrophic. The North and the South are mixed in Europe. This vision may seem catastrophic, but dear friends, we have become too much used to living without a vision! A scarcely known poem written by John Paul II recites, "Man suffers most, I think, deprived of his vision". And he concludes: "If he suffers from lack of vision – he has to struggle through signs...".

The Prize that is granted to me is a small sign that addresses not only me personally. I understand why it is given to me. I am not a politician, I am not a man of the institutions. My life is bound to the Community of Sant'Egidio, which is made of men, women, believers, friends of the poor, actors of dialogue between religions, but also between secular and religious believers. Most of all, Sant'Egidio lives on the streets of the cities, of the suburbs of the great European cities: from Rome to Aachen, to Berlin, to Paris, to Brussels, to Kiev and to Naples, only to mention a few. Sant'Egidio is a European reality, and it feels a passion to live and work outside Europe.

This Prize is a sign for me, an appeal to Europeans, a call to Christians. Politics cannot manage alone.

Speaking of Christianity, we have no desire to confessionalize the continent. A great prize-winner in the past was Frère Roger Schutz, a reformed Swiss who started a monastic ecumenical life in Taizé in the heart of war, making the place a crossroads for young Europeans and a sanctuary of peace and faith. As an elderly man he was killed in 2005, while he was praying among the youth. His death shows a life defenceless, offered to the youth on the hilltop of Taizé. This man's Christianity, as well as that of many others, challenges the weary and short-sighted conscience of Europe.

The Christian faith – that we live at Sant’Egidio – calls to live not for oneself. The Apostle Paul writes:

“He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (2 Cor 5:15).

The powerful call of the Gospel of Jesus, borne by Paul to Europe, to Greece, in Rome, the powerful call of the Gospel challenges the culture of living for oneself. Europe cannot live for herself. The focus cannot be only the economic expansion of one’s region, or one’s country at the most. To live for oneself forces to a completely mercantile rationale. Practical materialism, after Marxist materialism, rules over so many European customs: marketism devours spaces of gratuitousness. And we see with our own eyes the crisis of community life, of families, of local communities. Even the pursuit of one’s own interest requires spirit, generosity, and vision.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century European countries, affected by nationalism, went to war one against the other. How many lives were lost! It was the greatest theft in history – said Settimia Spizzichino, a Roman Jew deported to Germany who was the sole woman survivor to the lager. Today we live in a different era: the culture of living for oneself leads to national selfishness, to local or regional egoism, and especially to a lack of vision. Men and women eventually die from living for themselves; nations, communities are eventually extinguished by living for themselves.

Europe does risk bidding farewell to history, declining into tabloid news. After being the conquerors of the world, Europeans have withdrawn, frightened. We no longer want to matter, Europeans are afraid of making mistakes. It is today’s politically correct. We need not repeat the mistakes of the past. In the frame of the European unity, we need to think of new ways to be part of the history of the world together.

“If he suffers from lack of vision – he has to struggle through signs...” John Paul II wrote. And the request for Europe that rises in many parts of the world, dear friends, is such a sign.

In Africa, in Latin America, during my journeys, I sense a request for Europe and a great interest in Europe’s choices. The world needs Europe, its humanism, its rational strength, its propensity for dialogue, its resources, its economic enterprise, its culture. Schuman, one of the founding fathers of Europe, once wrote: “European unity anticipates the universal solidarity of the future”.

And then Europe was at the origin of two world wars. But Europe can be a paradigm of peace and universal solidarity! It can deliver a crucial contribution to the history of peace and humanism in the world, rather than deteriorating on tabloid news columns!

Dear friends, Europe does have a historical mission. I think of Africa, where at least half of the Community of Sant’Egidio, which is made of Africans, lives, struggles and hopes. The President of the Italian Republic, Ciampi, who recently was awarded this Prize, once said, “A momentous challenge lies ahead: to soundly and durably connect the future of Africa to Europe”. The history that connects Europe and Africa is sorrowful and rich. But many European countries are withdrawing from Africa, which remains only the land where immigrants come to Europe from. Collaboration for African development, fighting against diseases (I think of the AIDS treatment, and of DREAM, which my friend Michel Camdessus spoke so well of), the struggle against war, are tasks for Europe. They are the true response to the unstoppable flow of emigration. This drift will not be stopped on the frontiers or by controls in the Mediterranean Sea. Economic rebirth, the rising of new hope in Africa will give back to Africans the desire to stay in their countries!

No frontiers, no more or less legal controls will stop this inevitable flow. We Europeans need to work for the rebirth of hope, of fresh opportunities in Africa. I strongly believe in the dream of President Senghor of Senegal, a great man of African and European culture, and I make it my own. His dream was Eurafica: two continents united and equal, one in need of the other. The first mission of Europe is called Africa. There being united will make sense.

Europe is a sign of peace in the world. We have been in peace for sixty years. Europe is one and manifold: how many different languages have echoed in this beautiful hall, we have different languages, different traditions, different cultures, different religions, different tastes and smells, and I wish to say, different cuisines. In its diversity, if it is united, Europe accomplishes the civilization of living together. And it is really the civilization the world is in want of. The world of homogenizing, levelling globalization, the world that reacts with clashes of civilization and religion; this civilization is missing in economics that lack humanism, and therefore become inhuman. The civilization of coexistence is our response to terrorism and fundamentalism.

Manifold Europe. I believe we need to recover our pride, not arrogant self-importance, but humble and conscious pride, the pride of our mission. Because manifold and united Europe embodies the civilization of coexistence, that is the civilization of the future: its ingredients are dialogue, respect for all freedom, the art of living together. "All relatives, all different", this is our dream. "All relatives, all different", these are the words of Germaine Tillon, who was imprisoned in the lager of Ravensbruck.

Today we need Europe more than yesterday. Otherwise globalization will make us irrelevant and our values irrelevant. We need a united Europe, with its mission; we need to be Europeans, not diluted, in order to exist in a large and terrible world, as Antonio Gramsci, an Italian communist betrayed by Stalin, used to call it. The more united Europe will be, the more united Europe we have, the less terrible our world will be.

Europe must be our passion, not something cloudy and remote. Our passion, because it is a necessity: an *ananké*. How short-sighted is the work of those who look at the future of our countries with their eyes fixed on tabloid news. The dream, the vision, are more realistic than realism itself, which is often short-sightedness. Back in 1978, John Paul II, perhaps the last great European leader, launched the dream of a united Europe stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Urals. It sounded like wishful thinking. People did not laugh too much because it was the Pope, but they all laughed all the same. United Germany seemed wishful thinking, it sounded like a utopia even to politicians in my country until the wall fell. It sounded like wishful thinking and a threat, and today united Germany stands as one of the fundamental pillars of Europe and of a world with more economic justice, a world at peace. History is full of surprises and it is moved, more than we know, by the profound currents of the spirit and of generous passions.

Europe is not a far or remote dream. Dear friends, we are Europeans more than we are aware of, we are made of the stuff of Europe. The citizens of our countries are more European than they know. European institutions, the President of the Parliament knows it, count a lot in all the countries. The human and cultural fabric we live in is European. There is a constant pouring in and out. Young people move as Europeans. Every relevant enterprise on the continent is faced with a European scenario.

We need, in a sense, to attack the palace of power and of Europe. But not with violence. We need to attack the palace of Europe with our European passion and with ideas and visions. We need to help politics and government leaders to dream of a Europe of peoples, and we need to help everyone to dream of the Europeans as one people. And we are in a hurry. A tremendous acceleration will come also from the resolve of European citizens, who need to keep the vision of Europe high. Dear friends, visions are icons of hope. We all need to see hope. Visions arouse passion for the future and make us see hope.

**There is a lot that we, Europeans of the streets, can do. After this day of great honour for my person and for the Community of Sant'Egidio, after the wonderful protagonism of this day in Aachen, which I thank you for, I will go back to the streets, in the humble, modest and daily terms of my life. I strive to be a man, I strive to be a European. As the great Hillel used to say, a Hebrew teacher at the time of Jesus, "in a place where there are no men, you, at least you, strive to be a man!". I will try! Thank you!**