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**President of the European Council  
Herman Van Rompuy**

**Acceptance speech on the occasion of the Award of the  
European Prize Coudenhove-Kalergi 2012  
"Peace and the European idea"**

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the European Society Coudenhove-Kalergi for awarding me the European Prize. It is a great honour for me to be awarded the European Prize for 2012 and I consider it a special honour to receive this prize from your Society. I am conscious of the Society's continuous efforts to promote European integration, and I owe you a debt of gratitude for this work.

I am also aware – and I now have Presidents Mr von Habsburg and Mr Terrenoire in mind – that you also deserve congratulating, as you are celebrating ninety years of the Pan-Europa movement today, tomorrow and on Sunday. What a milestone, and what an achievement! Please accept my warmest congratulations!

Count Coudenhove-Kalergi is a familiar figure for me, or should I say a familiar face. I was first introduced to his thinking when a fellow student in Leuven devoted her thesis to his works. And today, every morning, I enter the building of the European Council and I pass along a gallery of portraits, and it opens with a portrait of the very first winner of the Karlspreis, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi.

## **P R E S S**

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Back in 1922, when this Tokyo-born young aristocrat living in Vienna started to campaign for the European idea, it was just that: an idea. Hapless, it seemed, and utopian. But in the uncertainty of the times, right after the worst war in the history of mankind, the idea struck a chord.

The young Coudenhove-Kalergi deeply believed that the cycle of destructive wars could be stopped, that the power of persuasion – including his own sense of persuasion – could change the course of history.

And he was right. His belief had a name: Europa. It was not the belief in one system of government over another. No, he believed in Europe as a civilisation. A unique continent, defined less by its geographic borders than by the wealth and diversity of its culture, as well as by its core values: human dignity, and freedom. We recognise it: it's our Europe. Coudenhove-Kalergi devoted his life to making this European idea become alive – by writing, speaking, organising, convincing.

Today, here we are in Vienna, 90 years later. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi would have been surprised to look at the world surrounding us. Of course he did live to see Franco-German reconciliation – embodied by the Elysée Treaty of 1963, or Friendship Treaty. I like this word 'friendship' – *Traité d'amitié, Freundschaftsvertrag*: it gives a human touch to interstate relations.

Attending the ceremony in the Reims Cathedral, at the personal invitation of President de Gaulle, must have been one of the most rewarding moments of his life. Of course he did see our continent rise from the ashes after 1945: the return of prosperity and employment for most citizens, at least in Western Europe. But he did not live to see the end of the reign of Communism in the Eastern half of the continent, communism which he fought his whole life.

Nor did he see Europe's political journey, from a market and a trade bloc to a full-blown political entity with its own Parliament, its own currency, its own flag, a common foreign policy. And even its own unofficial capital, Brussels, a choice he had remarkably foreseen already in 1934!

So I imagine he would certainly have been pleasantly surprised to find out today that 27, soon to be 28 European states, many from Eastern and Central Europe, belong to our one and single Union. Remember that when Coudenhove died, in 1972, the countries within the then Community were still only Six, the founding states, and about to become Nine. If you allow me a side note – there is another thing, which on the contrary would not have surprised him: the rise of non-European powers.

As he wrote in Pan-Europa: *"Given the political and economic fragmentation in which it finds itself, will Europe be able to preserve its peace and maintain its independence in the face of growing non-European world powers, or will it be forced to organise itself as a federation of states to save its own existence?"*

In 1923, it is an incredibly early acknowledgment that European nations, even the mightiest among them, were losing their place in global affairs. The names of the challengers may have changed, but it is as true today as it was back then.

You often read that political Europe was born after the Second World War, thanks to men like Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer who founded the European Communities, forerunners of our Union. It is true, but not the whole truth. In politics, the intellectual groundwork is essential; there the Pan-European movement played an indispensable role before 1945. Just as the American abolitionist movement, through decades of writing and action, prepared the ground for President Abraham Lincoln to be able to finally abolish slavery, so Pan-Europa, in making the idea of a united Europe conceivable, *denkbar*, for many more people than ever before, ... so Pan-Europa made it possible for Monnet and Schuman to seize the moment in 1950.

For Coudenhove's "Pan-Europa", the moment was certainly fertile, so shortly after the First World War. The movement showed the way on how to avoid a new war, how to guarantee peace. But unfortunately, we needed a Second World War, before the moment was really ripe for this message of peace and action. And for that delay, in those dramatic years 1939-1945, we Europeans paid a heavy price ...

The question for us today still is: Do we need Europe in order to preserve peace? Do we still need people to carry and promote the idea of Europe? Yes, we do. I personally have always been convinced of this. Ultimately, peace is at the heart of what we are doing as a Union. The Norwegian Nobel Committee has reminded us recently of this elementary fact. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize is a great tribute to past achievements: how the European Union helped transform a continent of wars into a continent of peace. In these times of uncertainty it is also an encouragement to continue our work.

And I am thinking first of all of the Union's work on enlargement, in particular in the Western Balkans. Here in Austria you are deeply aware of the stakes, of the disruptive force of violent nationalism, which in the past century so cruelly affected Central Europe.

Your neighbour Slovenia has been a member of the Union for over eight years now; Croatia will join mid next year. Serbia became a candidate country this spring, joining in this respect Montenegro, and also your country, President Ivanov.

Ever since I took up my mandate as President of the European Council, I have defended the European perspective for the Western Balkans. Their (and your) wish to join our Union follows barbaric and violent times, which we had thought impossible in post-1945 Europe.

But that is even more of a reason to welcome these countries. Almost all the current members of the Union have experienced great upheavals within living memory. It is true for Germany, France and the other founders after the destruction of the Second World War. It is true for Greece, Spain and Portugal after the end of their dictatorships. It is true for the former communist countries that joined us after the Wall came down.

In every enlargement, the Union has absorbed the shocks. As an anchor of stability. As a haven of prosperity and freedom. As a warrantor of peace. The entry of the Western-Balkans into the Union will seal an end to the last civil war in Europe's long history – no more, no less.

So to those who say that war is so distant in our past that peace cannot be a key issue in Europe anymore, that the idea of preserving peace does not appeal to the younger generations, I answer: just go out there and ask the people! And ask the younger ones too!

There is still a way to go before all Balkan countries are integrated in the European Union, but I am convinced that together, we can overcome all the obstacles on the road. In the name of peace in Europe, we simply must! For me, our efforts for the last three years to overcome the economic and financial crisis in Europe must also be seen in this light.

Dealing with the debt crisis that started in Greece in early 2010 has been defining for my mandate as President of the European Council. Here I will not enter into all the important measures that we decided to help the situation improve: rescue mechanisms, better surveillance of budgets, bubbles and banks. Nor will I enter into the interplay of all the European and national leaders and institutions involved in achieving this.

No, the essence is this. We are doing all this not only for the sake of balance sheets and healthy economies – although high unemployment is undermining the support for national and European policies. We are doing this also for eminently political reasons. To keep our Union together. To preserve, beyond monetary stability, the security of our countries, our societies, our citizens tout court. To make sure we can deal jointly with the challenges of tomorrow.

When I chair summit meetings that bring together 27 Presidents and Prime Ministers, I can feel this political conviction very strongly around the table. We have expressed it numerous times, in very simple words: "We will do whatever is required to maintain the monetary stability of the euro area." Some were sceptical, others complained it was too little and too late. But we have proven over and over again that we did what had to be done, and that leaders were capable of convincing sometimes reluctant parliaments and public opinions to follow along the way. The existential threat of a year ago now lies behind us. But if ever it re-emerged, from this experience it is my strong conviction that Europe will act again.

All along we have acted upon two basic principles: responsibility and solidarity. They must also guide all future action. Responsibility of all to do their part of the work, and solidarity from all with those who need it. Especially within the eurozone, these are two sides of the same coin. We will only come out of this together: *Wir sind eine Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, to use a word of which the author of Pan-Europa was fond.

This is why I think that the work of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, that already almost spans a century now, will stretch deep into the future and continue to inspire the generations to come. Europe is only at its beginning.

I know everyone in this room is conscious that the idea of Europe didn't only need engagement, support, before becoming a political reality. No, it still does, even now this reality exists. But I am confident in Europe's future. What we have built in over 60 years cannot easily be destroyed. The forces which hold the Union together are stronger than those that undermine it.

Right after my speech, according to the programme, we will have the pleasure to listen to the European anthem – Alle Menschen werden Brüder ...

I have to confess it is only whilst preparing this visit that I found out that the choice for the anthem was the suggestion of no other than Count Coudenhove-Kalergi himself, back in 1955. It shows that this man of ideas or rather, this man of a single, great and generous idea, was above all a man of action. In politics, after all, words are in fact deeds, and so are symbols.

For Europa, our Europe, the challenge was then and still is today: winning the hearts and marking the minds of the people. We can have treaties and institutions, we can have a Bank and a currency, we can meet among leaders and decide, but all this activity only finds its fulfilment with the consent of the Europeans.

I thank you all for your contribution to this great endeavour.

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