



CALL TO EUROPE V “ISLAM IN EUROPE”: Brussels, 24th - 25th June 2015

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Thank you Mr. Stetter.

Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema, and President Stanishev, congratulations for your very inspiring remarks.

Dear friends,

I thank the Foundation for European Progressive Studies for convening this meeting, it comes at an important crossroad.

We are confronted with a choice: we can go on with business as usual and see intolerance and ignorance on the rise, or we can join efforts to bridge the lack of understanding and the fear that separates people of different cultures and religions. Together we can engage and educate to combat the stereotypes and prejudices that are breeding new generations intolerance.

Today more than ever Islam is the subject of these stereotypes. The savage war of Daesh in the Middle East has horrified the world. But the threat is global. It has struck Libya, Mali, Nigeria, the Horn of Africa, Asia, the Americas and Australia. And also we in Europe have suffered despicable attacks supposedly in the name of Islam.

However, we must say loud and clear that those terrorists disrespect Islam's values and humanity's values. They murder in the name of God to justify evil actions that no religion tolerates. They misuse Islam and spread a totalitarian ideology that feeds on hate.

We stand for a plural Europe, where different faiths and cultures can coexist. And Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance, should be an integral part of Europe. The inclusive Europe we believe in.

A diverse Europe can only be successful if it is based on mutual respect. And mutual respect cannot be enforced just by legislative measures. It needs to be lived in our streets and neighbourhoods; it has to become part of our DNA from childhood.

There are many ways in which we can teach history. We can base our common identity as the opposition to the "enemy", or we can learn the lessons of sharing a common history and mutual influence over centuries. Let's take the example of the Mediterranean. We can present the North and South as a civilizational divide, or we can see the Mediterranean as the Mare Nostrum of exchanges and mutual enrichment.

The same goes for my own country. Muslims coexisted with Jews and Christians in the Iberian Peninsula over several centuries producing a rich culture which allowed, for example, for the School of Latin, Hebrew and Arab translators in Toledo.

There is no purity when it comes to culture or race. All our nations are the result of centuries of different people travelling and intermingling. The population of Europe is diverse, and so are the religious backgrounds of those who want to build a united Europe. We all have a role to play in the EU integration, regardless of our ethnicity, our background and religious affiliation, or our non-religious affiliation.



Our common affiliation must be citizenship. If we really believe in a diverse Europe, our foundation should be mutual respect. In this regard, educating in values such as coexistence or respect to minorities, dialogue and inclusiveness emerges as a key instrument to inspire our societies, and especially young people. Civic and social values should be taught at schools as part of a comprehensive education. We need, in short, an education to be better citizens.

In order to preserve mutual respect, the religious leaders have an important role to play in preventing hate speech -alongside politicians and policy makers-

Religious leaders must speak out to denounce incitement against communities, religions or individuals, and solidarity with victims. They should correct myths and rumours that can lead to misperceptions. From that perspective, we should empower the moderate voices.

This is where international initiatives such as Alliance of Civilisations and the International Centre for Dialogue, based in Vienna, come in. Spain has been at the origin of both initiatives with progressive governments.

Dear friends,

The existence of the European Union is a unique achievement. The shadow of the war that existed at the founding of this institution has been lifted, we live under governments freely elected, and we widely enjoy a welfare state with rights and freedoms. One of those fundamental rights is religious freedom.

We are wrestling with an issue that is crucial for our societies: how to safeguard equally important freedoms. The freedom to follow one's own conscience and to practice one's religion, while securing other fundamental freedoms.

In Europe, we are seeing a growing number of violent attacks by people claiming to be acting in the name of religion. And at the same time, we are seeing a growing movement to marginalise or exclude religious minorities.

It is not a surprise that more and more people think that there is a conflict between freedom and religion, between secular values and religious ones. This is why interfaith dialogue must be a central part of our common efforts to make both freedoms compatible.

Interreligious dialogue must be at the core of our efforts to fight religious intolerance and to protect individuals from discrimination or violence. Dialogue is the only way we can overcome the dangerous misperceptions that isolate minorities.

Dear friends,

Religion governs the lives of millions of people, shapes their worldviews and guides their behaviour. People find comfort and values in their faith, and sometimes also insecure people need to find assurance. Religion offers security and a shared identity to many who live in fear.

But if religion is misused to incite and justify hatred, prejudice and violence, the safe refuge becomes an oven for radicalization. Too many young people are disappointed by the false sense of identity that extremists offer. Only dialogue can reverse that disappointment.



The good news is that for the vast majority of the faithful worldwide, religion is an inspiration for good. I want to emphasise this in the context of the conference today about Islam. When this inspiration is put at the service of promoting coexistence and mutual understanding, dialogue strengthens the ability of people to understand each other. Where there is understanding, there are also the foundations for respect and civility.

This is true not only for dialogue among followers of different religions, but also for the dialogue between politics and religion, as well as the dialogue between religious and secular worldviews, including religious leaders and media professionals.

Dear friends,

In January I joined millions of people in Paris, and we all marched, united, against violence and intimidation.

There were no flags, except the one that showed our unity in the face of violence. Today, I want to conclude by calling for that “unity of the moderates”, which is a progressive value.

The unity of the policy makers, religious leaders, media professionals, and the citizens of Europe who advocate for a free, diverse and peaceful society. Under the only flag of a common European citizenship, regardless our ethnic, religious or political identity.

Thank you very much.