

Speech of In-coming EUI President Yves Mény at the Academic Session of the European University Institute in Florence, November 7, 2001

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[Editors' Note: Professor Yves Mény, Director of the Robert Schuman Center of Advanced Studies and in-coming President of the EUI, presented these remarks as part of the Celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE in the Badia Fiesolana, Fiesole, Italy, on 7 November 2001. The Editors wish to express gratitude to Professor Mény for allowing GLJ to publish his speech.]

[1] Allow me to set aside all protocol and hierarchy and to simply address you as dear "fellow-citizens of Europe". Indeed, is it not true that what unites all of us beyond the EUI's birthday that we are celebrating today, the President, the Commissioners, the Ambassadors, Professors, Students, Friends from Florence and other places, is the beautiful utopia of gathering Europeans around different projects, substantial aspirations and spiritual values? The Institute is a small, but nevertheless an essential part of the Europe we see in the process of becoming. When seen against this Europe, made up of bits and pieces, of stop and go, of hesitations and sudden awakenings, of enthusiasms and repentance, the Institute, in this light, seems a perfect illustration of the European *modus operandi*.

[2] Although the Europeans had – at least since the Congress in the Hague – been guided by an intuition of Europe as something in need of an intellectual and cultural dimension, it was through the otherwise sterile EURATOM Treaty that the idea of a European University was made possible. Still, it was not until 1972, that – at the time of enlargement – the idea of creating an intergovernmental institution was to take concrete shape. When an embryo goes through a fifteen year gestation, there is much to fear for the newborn. It is an ill-loved child, even perhaps a bit deformed, which its parents hardly recognize by and marginalize. To this child that was not really wanted, a strange and unfortunate name was given: Institut Universitaire Européen – but wait until you hear the English or the German versions. In short, all the conditions were met that would make this child the ugly little European duckling in the midst of superb national swans.

[3] But, experience demonstrates it: what were once fragile or ugly children, can become magnificent adults. It is indeed a fairy tale that unfolded at the Badia Fiesolana. Or perhaps it was not really a fairy tale. Indeed, it took the dedication of the Presidents, Max Kohlstam, Werner Maihofer, Emile Noël and Patrick Masterson, the energy of the secretaries general Marcello Buzzonetti and Antonio Zanardi-Landi, the administration's commitment, the teaching and research of dozens of professors for the Institute to grow and to become the university we know. It needed also the enthusiasm and the passion of several hundred students which by now have spread throughout Europe and constitute – particularly in national Universities – the most extraordinary transnational network of scholars. The short interval of European universities at the end of the Middle Ages has again become a reality.

[4] The torch which is being passed on to me represents a particularly demanding and stimulating challenge. Over the past twenty-five years, the University has grown in size as it is has in quality. Did you know that the EUI is the greatest if not the leading post-doctoral institution in the social sciences and that, each year, we provide European Universities with young professors whose training is unique, and whose pluri-national and cultural character are unsurpassed?

[5] Did you know that the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies is one of Europe's most acclaimed European centres, one that attracts fellows from all continents and, particularly, from the best European and American universities? Did you know that that the greatest distinction granted by the prestigious American Political Science Association crowned one of our professors this year, and a Florentine at that, Stefano Bartolini? Did you know that each year dozens of books, hundreds of articles are published by our professors and students in all of Europe's languages?

This « academic heritage » compels us to reach and go higher, and further.

[6] Our primary duty is to be and remain faithful to our fundamental mission, that is as a place of study, of research, of thought and of debate. As the New York Times reminded us two weeks ago in relation to the need for thought and discussion on the tragic events of the 11th September: « Academic institutions betray their core principles if they stifle intellectual inquiry and robust debate ». Our horizon, our field of action can only be a search for the Universal that does not compromise with ideological, political or religious prejudices.

[7] Our second mission is to be at the vanguard of excellence. Our natural competitors are the greatest European and

American universities. These are the ones with whom we should launch a healthy and stimulating emulation – one that of course does not exclude cooperation. A mediocre and second rank European University has neither future nor reason to exist. But this should not lead either to the splendid isolation of the « top ten » or to an academic « fortress Europe ». We must and will have to contribute increasingly to the development of weaker, less well-endowed universities which suffer from cultural and intellectual isolation. How could we fail to hear the immense call not only from Eastern Europe, but also from regions further away? There is a demand for Europe in many areas of the world. How could we ignore Latin America's requests? How long will the scandal of a Europe continue, that ignores Asia, one which knows almost nothing of it except when old colonial ties remain? It is time to launch long term programs to be better prepared tomorrow, because the response to today's challenges cannot be improvised in a matter of weeks.

[8] Let us look at the United States and draw some lessons. It is only on the other side of the Atlantic that the fundamental role of education in general and of university in particular have been understood. From its earliest steps, the young American Federation, through the North West Ordinance, sought to stimulate and endow the young emerging universities, thanks to generous donations of federal land. We do not ask that much Mr. President. You do not have land to distribute and the European Space is not the Far-West. But let us aspire this evening to bet on the future, to bet on the young and on the quality of their education.

[9] We have a third mission which is to innovate, to be at the « cutting edge ». We have acknowledged competencies in numerous field which it would be too long to mention. Where we have already made headway, we should defend our comparative advantage; where our position is weaker, we must do what it takes to become the best. Individual excellence is what it takes, but also the implementation of programs such as the Consumer Chair, the B.P. financed transatlantic program, the Mediterranean program. As regards the latter, how could we not manifest our gratefulness to Italian companies - and Tuscan ones in particular: Cassa di Risparmio, Monte dei Paschi - who support this initiative, alongside the Tuscan region and the Florence municipality. Allow me also to announce a new development this evening: the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Databank on International Migration whose first pilot phase will be directed by professor Fargues. It is in the same innovating spirit that post-doctoral programs will soon be launched for young academics. This is an unprecedented initiative in Europe, and it is to be hoped that it will stimulate similar experiences. Let us not be afraid of competition, on the contrary. It is competition that will allow us to steer free of mediocrity and rent-seeking activities.

[10] One last goal, finally, availability. Let us leave no doubt: we are neither the spearhead, nor the think tank of the Commission or of any other institution and do not wish to be. Indeed, it is in all's interest that we retain our autonomy, our independence and our critical mind. But this must not lock us into an ivory tower. We will indeed be available each time our skill allows us to play a useful part in Europe. We can use the knowledge gained through our research. We can add, if need be, a touch of imagination. Because, as the writer Jean Giono put it, « to imagine is to choose ».

[11] Here are a few missions that the European University must take on. As it happens, it is doing so in Florence, at the Badia Fiesolana.

[In Italian in the original text] At this point I would like to say that I made a mistake at the beginning when I said that this university was probably born of an unknown father. The father, maybe. But the University did have a mother, Italy, which always cherished the child, even before it was born. I would like to thank Italy for its hospitality, for its generosity. Yes indeed, Italy is our mother, but in an even greater way. We are all her sons thanks to the heritage of Athens and Rome which Italy has transmitted to us, thanks to the humanism which remains our most precious capital.[end of passage in Italian in the original text]

[12] Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank-you for conveying by your visit, an exceptional one in many ways, your support and your encouragements. Together we come together to build a still ill-defined object, over which consensus is still far from being reached, the European Union.

In recently re-reading Montesquieu I found this definition which, I believe, could rally quite a few and perhaps even all:

« What is referred to as Union in a political body is something that is very ambiguous: the true union is one of harmony which leads all the parts, however opposed they may seem to us, to combine for society's greatest good; as dissonances in music, jointly make up a total order ».

[13] Mr. President, dear friends, the Europe that we wish, the Union that we seek is none other than the harmony that comes from the combination of dissonances. This also is the University's mission. It only has a meaning if its goal is universality. But this search for universality is made-up of contradictions, debates, intellectual confrontations, a critical mind. Our university is Florentine and Italian by its location, European by its composition and its missions, but its drive can only be universality, that universality which aims to better understand man and society. It would be of little use to build a globalized world if misunderstanding, the ignorance and suspicion of the other remained. From this point of view, the European construction as much as our University bring an important contribution: to better understand, to better be understood, so that Europe can be made into something more universalist than anything that

has been created or imagined so far.

[14] Allow me to conclude by saying « Happy Birthday » to the Institute or rather, to use the somewhat magical Italian formula inherited from Rome : « Auguri », may the Gods be with you!