

Closing statement of the Whitsun Dialogue “Geist und Gegenwart” Memorandum Seggauberg 2013

The “Geist & Gegenwart” Whitsun Dialogues at Seggau Castle serve to determine the *status quo* of the “European project”; its opportunities, hopes, but also dangers and problems, its developments and challenges.

The fifth biennial Whitsun Dialogue, which took place from May 15th to 17th 2013, was held under the general motto “United States of Europe. Hope. Venture.”. This programmatic and challenging general theme, which sounds provoking to some, was deliberately chosen in order seriously to discuss and describe a perspective that goes beyond the necessary current problem-solving strategies and mere talk of crisis.

We are aware that the mood has changed radically since the first Whitsun Dialogue in May 2005. Trust has been lost to an alarming extent whilst, on the other hand, frustration and protest have increased.

Initially, the negative outcome of national referenda on the EU Constitutional Treaty and then, in 2008, the onset of the severe financial, monetary and economic crisis in several EU Member States. Almost five years have passed since then, and no one can claim that the crisis has ultimately been overcome.

By the same token, a number of crisis summits have prevented the collapse of the eurozone to date and have contributed to a stabilisation of the situation.

Needless to say, the history of the EU can be written as a history of crises and setbacks, but the fact of the matter is that our parents and grandparents in war-ravaged Europe in 1945 would never have dreamt of what is reality today. Today’s prosperity and stability would have seemed a sheer utopian dream. More importantly: peace, freedom, democracy and the rule of law not only prevail in the core of Europe but, for more than three decades, have also held true for Spain, Greece and Portugal, which overcame their dictatorships. Over two decades ago, our east and central European neighbours too were able to shake off Communist dictatorship and to cut through the Iron Curtain. Europe is breathing with both its lungs, with the EU counting 27 members today, and 28 members as of July 1st. Styria and Austria alike, as set out in all Seggau memoranda, have always espoused the Croatian EU membership. The European integration of the western Balkan countries has to continue.

Thanks to the European Union, Winston Churchill’s bold vision of the necessity of building a “kind of United States of Europe”, which he formulated in his famous Zurich speech in September 1946, is in a process of permanent realisation.

The United States of Europe may be a misleading concept if regarded as a mirror image of the United States of America. Europe's democratic union can only be a unique entity that is constantly evolving. A far more suitable description of this goal would appear to be offered by the European Union's motto, namely "unified in diversity". The immense wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity, of creativity as well as of innovative and (self-) critical thought is one of Europe's principal strengths and its unique characteristic. Humanistic and religious core values, marked by the Christian tradition in particular, are inextricably and permanently linked to the spiritual foundation of Europe.

A reinforced European integration cannot and must not be at the expense of democracy and transparency. More Europe equals less democracy, more frustration and less trust on behalf of the citizens – this would be a fatal formula.

Europe must not be looked upon as an elitist project divorced from reality; Europe needs legitimisation, support and co-determination on behalf of its citizens. This requires a serious, patient, sustainable and permanent information, clarification and discussion process. Everything must be done to strengthen the precious resource of the citizens' trust in democracy and Europe – trust is the indispensable foundation, as was already stated by Jean Monnet, the brainchild of European unity. "Nothing can be achieved without people, nothing is lasting without institutions." And Monnet also said: "Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises."

So in times of crisis it is imperative to find forward-looking solutions and to gain people's trust. Europe has to be a project made by people for people. So Europe must not be thought of as a soulless project for dispassionate consideration; Europe needs to reach both people's hearts and minds. Europe is more than an economic union; Europe also offers a unique social and societal model. It is ultimately about the soul of Europe. During the Whitsun Dialogue 2007, the US-American futurologist Jeremy Rifkin pointed to the exemplary role of Europe in this respect.

What is more, the Whitsun Dialogues are a clear pro-European statement – not in a way that reflects uncritical EU or Euro euphoria, but rather as reflected in careful consideration and exchange of arguments and possible alternatives. The Whitsun Dialogues are a statement against demagoguery, cheap populism and primitive propaganda. They are a deliberate statement in favour of a serious course of European politics and a rational discourse. Together the grant programme for students and the Geist & Gegenwart publication* make an important contribution towards sustaining the results obtained throughout the discussions.

We are well aware that there is no linear or inevitably positive development, but that the European path is a rocky road, which has to be pursued with perseverance, patience and a concept. Europe is about both hope and daring. It is necessary to dare a great deal in order to strengthen hope.

* "Demokratische Einigung Europas. Das Hoffen wagen." [Europe's democratic unification. Daring to hope], Wieser Verlag. ISBN 978-3-99029-066-8