

Europe.valued

Memorandum Seggauberg 2015

Held every two years since 2005 at Seggau, the series of Whitsun Dialogues, “Geist & Gegenwart” [spirit and present], have served to determine the *status quo* of the “European project”; its opportunities, hopes, but also dangers and problems, its developments and challenges.

This very year 2015 has presented particularly many factors to motivate an examination of that status in Europe and Austria: 70 years since the end of the Second World War and the National Socialist reign of terror, 60 years since the Austrian State Treaty, 40 years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, 25 years since the Paris Charter of OSCE states, 20 years since Austria entered the EU.

The progress achieved by the European project since 1945 is both extremely impressive and encouraging: it has heralded the longest period of peace in the history of western and central Europe, with military confrontation between EU member states being altogether inconceivable today. The founding of the EEC by six nation states in 1957 led to a continuous process of enlargement, integration and consolidation, despite a steady stream of crises and setbacks. Today 28 states are members of the EU, whilst additional states strive for accession. The *annus mirabilis* 1989 brought the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain and Communist dictatorships in numerous central European states, followed in many cases by their accession to the EU.

Consequently there was an optimistic note to the Paris Charter of November 1990:

“Europe is liberating itself from the legacy of the past. The courage of men and women, the strength of the will of the peoples and the power of the ideas of the Helsinki Final Act have opened a new era of democracy, peace and unity in Europe ...

We undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations ...

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings, are inalienable and are guaranteed by law ...

Economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility are indispensable for prosperity.”

Confirmed by oath, this new era does not arise automatically; rather, currently there is evidence of great and difficult challenges, threats and problems, accompanied by the return of ghosts of adversaries long since believed to have been vanquished:

Dramatic movements of refugees on an unforeseen scale, the growth of anti-EU, populist parties in practically all European states, discussions of the United Kingdom leaving the EU, the threat of “Grexit”, alarmingly high unemployment levels particularly of young people, climate change, energy revolution, structural and economic problems, questions of equality and justice, a growing separation between ordinary citizens and the “European elite”, ever more violent fundamentalism, separatist, xenophobic, nationalist tendencies, migration flows, pressing questions of integration, contempt of fundamental human rights and international law – these are some of the demanding problematic areas.

The 6th Whitsun Dialogue from 20th – 22nd May 2015 was therefore quite deliberately aligned with the general theme of “Europe.valued”. The intent is both to underline fundamentally and programmatically the great value of the European project, and to make reference to the foundation of values alongside the mutual tensions between those values.

On the basis of the results and closing statements of previous Whitsun Dialogues, we therefore state:

1. Despite all adverse developments and points of criticism, the European Union is a model for success, which has delivered and continues to deliver freedom, peace, respect for human rights, democracy, constitutional liberalism, prosperity, an eco-social market economy and an open society. This European model for success, through an ever closer union of Europe’s citizens, shall continue to be developed in a determined, robust and sensitive manner.
2. Human rights are inalienable, indivisible and universal. An obligation exists to take assertive action in their interest, avoiding presumption or paternalism but indeed showing resoluteness. Human dignity is inviolable.
3. Freedom of opinion is a fundamental prerequisite for every democratic debate and for societal progress. It should be protected, whilst every attempt at restriction or intimidation should be countered with determination.
4. Freedom to practise religious is, of course, an integral component of universal human rights. Religion can make a valuable contribution to the ethical foundations of society. This is conditional on mutual respect between religions and respect for the liberal, democratic constitutional state.
5. An inexhaustible plethora of regions, languages and cultures constitutes Europe’s wealth. For this unique feature of Europe to have its fullest effect in global terms through its communal foundation of values, there is a particular need for respect, tolerance and solidarity. Thus creativity and innovative strength, which flourish in the humus of this individuality, diversity, plurality and tradition, are fostered as Europe’s special assets.
6. To support this, the European project should take an exemplary stance in the interest of an energetic, open society in a stable, liberal and democratic constitutional state, alongside economic development that conserves resources and features well-balanced innovation, in which everyone has a fair share.
7. A continuous, patient and broad dialogue is needed, taking concerns, problems and negative sentiment seriously, if citizens are to be won over to the European project for the long term.
8. Over and above rational dialogue, there is a need to tell of the value and values of the European project, in order to reach people’s hearts and give Europe a soul.

The historical and geopolitically evolved task of building bridges of understanding and encounter, as well as transcending borders, falls precisely to Austria and Styria. The Whitsun Dialogue has the purpose of providing a long-lasting contribution to building such bridges through open discussion of current, fundamental problems, supported by the scholarship programme, publications and closing statements. The series of Whitsun Dialogues make a clear, pro-European statement – self-critical but not maudlin, observing rather from a well-founded, realistically optimistic perspective.

So it is that, despite all the conflicts and problems, the firm conviction of all those assembled at Schloss Seggau is that the European project is indeed valued, there being ample justification to apply the maximum effort to living by, amplifying and promulgating those European values.