

*László Trócsányi*³

Keynote Speech⁴

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Honourable Guests,

I wholeheartedly welcome you all at the conference on „Cultural Identity: the Role of Religion in Europe”.

I would like to share two very topical quotes with you to start off today’s event. The first originates from Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission, who is a self-confessed Christian, practising his religion. “It is the mission of the Church to ensoul Europe, to assume the calling of prophets and the role of the messengers of the spirit, in the absence of which no political achievement shall endure. This is the mission of the Church, to again promote the fundamental commandments of the Christian fate in an age threatened by merciless selfishness, denial of diversity, and ancient, primeval hatred.” – he said.

The other quote is from Henri Spaak, former Belgian Prime Minister, who addressed the Belgian Parliament on 18 September 1954 as follows: “Shall I remind you that all of us, who might think differently in certain cases, pray in the same way? Do we know at all, that despite our different personal, individual or philosophical convictions, we belong to the same Christian civilisation? When we all have died and no one of us will be remembered, then in hindsight from somewhere in the prospects of time we shall yet be able to see to have lived this common adventure together.”

As for the topic of today’s conference, maybe some introductory thoughts on my part shall be appropriate. There is constant chatter on the European Union suffering from democratic deficit. Today, we especially see that in a certain sense the Union faces a lot of problems, from economic challenges to political tensions, and a high level of incomprehension is apparent on the part of the citizens. It was clear twenty to thirty years ago that us Europeans belong together, we shall work together and we are in need of the European integration. Today, after twenty to thirty years have passed, we shall address the issue why we shall work together. Our way of thinking has changed. I think that the problem is that the citizens do not really know what we expect from Europe. Churches have a very important liaison role in this question. They are not only able to express opinions of public life between the walls of the church, it is important that they be able to talk about poverty, social integration, morale and ethics outside the church as well, which is very important for the citizens of Europe to better understand each other.

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4 On the basis of the lecture delivered at the conference entitled “Cultural Identity: the Role of Religion in Europe” (25th April 2013)

Civil society organisations are parts of the private sector, and among these organisations the most important ones are the Churches themselves.

When we say *unity and diversity*, it is true not only of the level of the Member States but of the Churches as well. Unity because we share identical values, which are completely clear, regulated in different documents, and we could enumerate our different values here, starting with the rule of law. Nonetheless, we have our own national idiosyncrasies. Every country has her own history apparent in her national and constitutional identity. We can also talk about unity and diversity, when it comes to Churches. Ecumenism actually means unity, since there are certain shared creeds, certain shared values in the values of the different Churches. However, there are also enormous differences between certain religions and their dogma.

Consequently, *unity and diversity* is present in Europe on the level of Member States and on the level of Churches as well. However, there are common principles on the level of State and Church as well. If we look at the principle of subsidiarity, it really originates from those of the Catholic Church, constructed in relation to social and economic issues, and today it is one of the core principles of the European Union. The principle of solidarity, the protection of human rights is the duty of states; however, the churches also act as protectors of human rights. Social rights, the principle of non-discrimination, peace, the protection of human dignity; we can continue to counting values that bind us together.

I would like to also emphasise the importance of dialogue. Dialogue is an important task of states, the European continent and of churches. In the present Europe, where migration created a population of millions of citizens of non-Christian origin belonging to different faiths living, it is a fundamental question what ties the common European Christian culture forms with the religions of other continents. Thus, dialogue between religions became one of the core issues of the European Union. Obviously, infrastructural questions also come to mind, such as the relation of Church and State, an issue in which every county has her own different solution. Eventually, there is the issue of how the Church as a structure can engage in negotiations with the European Union.

We can see that the concepts of Church, State and Europe are interconnected notions. When we say that 'Europe shall be ensouled', or when we say that there is democratic deficit in Europe, the different churches and religions have a very important role therein. Obviously, it is not easy to answer to the questions raised, but at today's conference we have the opportunity to discuss these issues, and to look at what duties can the different churches and religions undertake in making the citizens of Europe better understand each other and to make common thinking and common responsibility to be a present value of the European Union rather than pulling away from each other.

I wish the conference a successful day and pleasant proceedings.