



GENERAL MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF HELMUT KOHL

Dear Pan-European friends,

With the death of Helmut Kohl, we lose the greatest German politician of the 20th century. Beside Konrad Adenauer, he was the greatest German Chancellor after Bismarck, although not a chancellor of war as the latter, but a chancellor of peace.

“Helmut Kohl was a stroke of luck for us Germans”, Angela Merkel said yesterday. However, he was a stroke of luck also for all the Europeans. Kohl accomplished in 1989-1990 simultaneously the unification of Germany and the unification of Europe. This was done in accordance with the spirit of Pan-Europe because “Pan-Europe” means “the whole Europe”. We must underline this the day after the sad news of his death reaches us. The one who set an example for us, the Archduke and Member of the European Parliament Otto von Habsburg had defended for many years in the European Parliament the interests of Central and Eastern European countries under the Soviet yoke until Helmut Kohl decisively contributed to their liberation.

Little is known that the German Chancellor had excellent relationship with Otto von Habsburg. He used to seek council from the Archduke. As democrats and liberal men, they were both convinced Europeans. Otto von Habsburg was an adversary of Hitler and the Catholic family of Helmut Kohl had no liking for National Socialism. They both regarded forgiveness and reconciliation as Christian values. In 1944 Walter Kohl, the older brother of Helmut Kohl,

became in his 18th year a victim of a strafing plane near Haltern in Nordrhein-Westfalen. This family tragedy reinforced his abhorrence of war as a means for political goals.

He sometimes recalled how Walter, when entering a tram as a young soldier, turned to him for the last time and bade farewell with the following words: "Take care of yourself, I won't be back. And above all, look after mum." His encounter with Hannelore Renner in 1948, when he was 18 and she 15, had also left a strong mark on him. She had witnessed the terrible bombings of Leipzig. She was raped several times by the Soviet soldiers who also threw her out the window, according to her own words, "like a bag of cement". In consequence, she suffered all her life from a spine injury. They both experienced „the hard years“ of the post-war era. They married in 1960.

If one ignores that, one cannot understand Kohl's engagement for a united, peaceful and European Germany without borders as well as his sympathy for peoples on which henchmen and partisans of Hitler had inflicted inexpressible suffering, i.e. for Poles, Luxembourgers, Alsatians, and Jews. He introduced to François Mitterrand one of the last survivors of the German Resistance, Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin, who was together with Claus von Stauffenberg on the 20th July 1944. From him Mitterrand learned that not all Germans are to blame. He experienced similar things also in his captivity during the war. This explains many things Mitterrand said and did afterwards.

Kohl belonged to the generation of war-afflicted children and at the same time to the generation of builders of European friendship saying "Never again". His friendship with Mitterrand reached its peak in 1984 when they held hands in front of the Douaumont ossuary in Verdun. This was a moment such as when De Gaulle et Adenauer had prayed together to their common God in 1962 in the Reims Cathedral. For the Christian Democrat Kohl it was not easy at first to cooperate with the Socialist Mitterrand. However, a close friend and adviser Alois Mertes had said to him that he has a common denominator with Mitterrand, namely Europe. That is how they contributed together to the strengthening of a friendly French-German cooperation and to the construction of a new European architecture. When he became the new Chancellor in 1982, he immediately made a visit to Mitterrand. Shortly before he took his flight to Paris, he had given his first interview as Chancellor to the German correspondent of "Figaro" and the future Member of the Pan-European Union Jean-Paul Picaper. The German newspapers were served only later. Kohl always gave the French-German friendship and the unity of Europe top priority. This did not, however, prevent him from being a German patriot.

After the crimes of the Third Reich, Konrad Adenauer, who served as an example for Kohl, had restored Germany's honour and democracy. Together with Charles de Gaulle, Adenauer brought to reality the dream of Europe as a community sharing the common destiny (Schicksalsgemeinschaft) and gave Europe its soul and spirit. Kohl completed this work with Mitterand. The adoption of Euro, which he realized with his friend Theo Waigel, was in his view something irreversible. With this move, he cemented Europe. The last years and months have shown, despite the crises, that he was right. Three quarters of the European economic and monetary union are not willing to give up Euro anymore.

After his election defeat in 1998 Kohl was treated with injustice. The people and one's successors are often ungrateful. History, which was very responsive to Kohl during 1989 and 1990, will be able to evaluate his work better than his contemporaries will. What would have become of us Europeans had he, faced with strong opposition, and crossed his arms? Kohl did not let himself be misled. He was immune to propaganda and lies. He showed strength of character, he was politically far-sighted and moderate; he had clear objectives, and knew how to orient himself. He was always doing what was possible and necessary.

He also had some misfortunes in his private life. We may recollect the tragic death of his spouse Hannelore who was suffering from a serious and incurable disease. He cherished friendship highly, and shed tears in 1999 in Paris at the funeral of Mitterand. He was only a man and had his faults. In 2008, he had suffered a stroke and a fall, which handicapped him and led finally to his death. In memory of this great politician who gave the history right impulses, we express our condolences to his spouse Maike Kohl-Richter, thanks to whose care he was able to survive these last years of his life and to whom we owe several of his statements that she was able to transmit to the world, as well as to his sons Walter and Peter who came back to him.

There remains a great deal for us to do. The construction of Europe was never finalized. Moreover, for us Pan-Europeans, while facing various problems and obstacles, it will always be encouraging and comforting to think of Helmut Kohl. We should always ask ourselves: "What would he do?", "What decision would he make?"

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