

**Address to the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering  
Rome, June 24<sup>th</sup> 2008  
Post factum edition**

AESI/EUCA additions

[spontaneous personal additions according to memory]  
(...audience reactions according to memory...)

*Sehr geehrter Herr Präsident*, (...laughter or other surprised reaction sounds...)

[for the sake of the most of us I'll do most of the rest in English] (...laughter...)

When I got to know I would have the chance to speak to you, [I thought I need to know something more about this man, and so] I visited your website (...laughter...) and I learned some interesting things about you. Among other things I learned you have [a son, actually you have] two sons, one of them called Benedict, or Blessed [from the Latin *benedictus*]. [Well I consider myself [benedictus] or blessed to address you now (...laughter...)] I am pleased at the thought of the presence of two German *praesides* here with me in the *urbs aeterna*, Rome [as professor Banús said earlier, everyone needs to get to say a few words in Latin] (...laughter...) – the other one incidentally being another Benedict, the Holy Father. I bring this up because I remember the news from Germany when the Pope was elected: one major newspaper opted for a rather pessimistic headline: [*Ratzinger ist Papst*] *Oh, Mein Gott!* (...laughter...) But another one chose otherwise and wrote: *Wir sind Papst!* (...laughter...)

*Also, Herr Präsident*, your website and your son, through the Pope and the German press, led me to this thought: *Wir sind die EU* – We are the EU – (...laughter...) and obviously, in a more profound sense, *you are* the EU (...laughter). But although we are not you, we are not two EU's (...laughter). [Perhaps] the great thing about the EU is the fact that it unites different people from different countries with different ideas – and we are a living example of that right here - a group of students from all around Europe, gathered here in one place with one goal: to help the EU move forward – the title of the forum being **”The EU promoting globalization of peace and solidarity”**. This significant event has been organised by AESI (European Association of International Studies) and EUCA (European University College Association) who are promoting a great cultural action among young Europeans by encouraging and developing European issues.

But [from the above-mentioned diversity within the EU] there arises the problem of whose ideas and values in the plethora of conflicting thoughts in the EU the EU should pursue. Perhaps facing this problem brings with it the temptation to simply disregard the issue of values and focus on politics and economics instead. But economics and politics aren't enough – and neither is it right to take simply the aspect the media portray as the current in young European thought and make that the only reality and rule.

We are evidence of a European youth that desires a true Europe, a human Europe, a virtuous Europe, a strong Europe. A Europe that is tolerant, not of evil and error, but of human beings without discrimination. A Europe that is democratic, not so that truth can be altered by majority opinion but so that no one is deprived of what truly constitute human rights. A Europe that is true to its roots, yes, its Christian roots. We don't want to sit on a branch and saw the tree from underneath us, the tree that holds us up, the tree that gives us life. This tree provides us with the solid values with which we can promote peace and solidarity as well as any other objective good. I fear that rejecting this would leave us to anarchy [and relativism as discussed earlier], and perhaps we have been witnessing some alarming examples of this already.

*Lieber Herr Präsident*, as the fruit of this conference we will present to you a document that you in turn will then present to the European Parliament. As of yet I do not know the exact wording or content of that document, but what I can say is this: whatever these people suggest to you in that document, carefully consider. (...some laughter..) I say this because I have experienced, both here and in the preliminary meeting we had in Brussels, that this group represents the much longed-for *soul* that Europe is in desperate need of. (...it was possibly here that Mr. Pöttering wrote something down in his notebook...) Perhaps the fact that many of these students come from the world of colleges has contributed to this spirit. College life assists them both in their professional and in their *human* development and growth. All of this is part of EUCA goals. EUCA envisages a big challenge: it promotes European integration and it focuses on international mobility of students.

I [would like to] repeat what I wrote on our mailing list after the Brussels meeting – I have sensed a unique spirit of fraternity, joy, respect, friendship and happiness after only a minimal time spent together with these students. I believe the EU is there for the people, and the people ultimately long for happiness and joy. (...another instance of possible notes by the President...) I am convinced that whatever this group presents to you is meant to and is able to communicate some of that spirit for the cause of a better Europe. So we entrust you with the task of making the Parliament take this to heart.

The European Union is promoting globalisation of peace and solidarity. The AESI and EUCA students have a strong sense of this responsibility and we wish to share it with you. For this reason we shall also work hard next year to realise a synthesis of these documents, and to present it to you during our next meeting: we hope that this meeting may be held at the European Parliament in February 2009.

*Lieber Freund*, dear friends, I would like to end by citing the example of Robert Schuman, your great predecessor and one of the founding fathers of the EU. He had good reason to mistrust the Germans, (...some laughter...) having been a prisoner of the Gestapo in Nazi-occupied France, but instead he transcended the legacy of the troubled past for the sake of the common good and magnanimously saw Franco-German friendship as a precondition for European integration. Later, the European Parliament declared Schuman the "Father of Europe". Schuman continues to stand as a witness to the ideals I have presented above. His view of Europe was inspired by a true Christianity of Charity, and he made Europe stand up and blossom. Let us keep the memory of our father alive.

Thank you very much.

(...applause...)

Personal commentary:

At the beginning I shook hands with Mr. Pöttering, we said "nice to meet you" to each other and I sat down next to him. I introduced myself and began the speech in front of a crowd of almost a hundred people, mostly students but also some professors, a representative of the Holy See and the rectors of the Hebrew and Palestinian Universities of Jerusalem. At a very early stage of the speech Mr. Pöttering whispered to the president of AESI to ask again what my name was. He was listening carefully, looking at me straight in the eyes and sometimes making notes. At the end he applauded, stood up and greeted me with some compliments ("very good", perhaps "all the best" or "good luck", and I said the same to him in German.) Then he made reference to me 3 times in his subsequent speech and said some personal things inspired by it, mentioning that he has never said it before. He spoke about his website, his son, his patron saint, Lech Walesa and solidarity, John Paul II, the mentioning of God in the EU documents not being sufficient – what is needed is that Christians live out their values in their daily lives. He spoke about peace in the EU and in the world, and human rights, mentioning specifically the case of Tibet and his not going to the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games. He expressed his wish to stay longer and welcomed us in February to Brussels. One could tell he was sincere and determined in what he said. Impressive.