

CIVIS - A EUROPEAN CIVIC UNIVERSITY

LAUNCH OF KICK OFF MEETING

19 NOVEMBER 2019

Dear President of the Council of Ministers,

Dear Minister of Education, University and Research,

Dear Ambassadors, Rectors and Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to sincerely thank you for having accepted this invitation to the kick-off meeting of *Civis - A European Civic University*, an achievement that all the Rectors in the alliance are very proud of.

As Europe undergoes changes, we continue to resist the scepticism of those who too easily forget the message of our founding fathers, who, after the Second World War, sought brotherhood, peace and sharing to promote reciprocal enrichment. The mission of universities on the old continent is to safeguard these values, cultivate them and pass them on to contribute to the reinforcement of the European identity.

At the beginning of the nineties, Helmut Kohl confided to Giuliano Amato that he shared his same worries: “Let’s hurry up. Those who follow us will not be as staunchly European as we are.”¹

¹ Speech by G. Amato at Sapienza for the 716th Inauguration of the Academic Year 2018-19, Jan. 17, 2019.

Universities have the duty to dismiss this worry. Our young university students have received a European education. They were born in this Union. They live it and breath it – even though they may not be fully aware of it – thanks to their studies. Like modern-day *clerici vagantes*, they are free to travel throughout the continent, sharing knowledge, culture and friendship.

And this is the mission of Civis: to promote that which Kant defined as a “cosmopolitan right” in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, to promote the European values, culture and citizenship amongst the new generations of students, advancing cooperation and multilingualism in an interdisciplinary context. In short, we must continue to tirelessly forge the civic conscience of a united Europe bolstered by our history and culture.

The even more ambitious challenge, therefore, is to develop an integrated university space for innovative and responsible didactic and research activities, where students, academics, researchers and personnel may move freely and collaborate in a spirit of profound civic commitment.

The construction of a European civic identity is a daily commitment because, as President Macron affirmed in his letter to European citizens, “Europe, like peace, has yet to be achieved.”² And in 2019 – on the hundredth anniversary of the signature of the “precarious” Peace Treaty of Versailles – this is a statement that resounds like an admonishment that we cannot, must not and will not ignore.

As Italian President Mattarella has reminded us: “We must be aware that it is impossible to step backwards in history. This means we must never forget its lessons ... and keep alive, on the contrary, the extraordinary and courageous memory of our foundation. We must remember that we managed to rekindle our continent, overcome the profound divisions that had injured it and once again produce ideas,

² E. Macron, *For a European Renaissance*, www.elysee.fr, March 4, 2019.

culture, rights and progress in all areas. We must remember that all of this took place because we became aware that we belong to a single cultural heredity and chose to develop the future of our peoples together.”³

Do not forget this lesson now takes on an even deeper meaning, especially in these days when the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall occurs.

Moreover, a Europe that is projected out globally, must necessarily face the Mediterranean. “Why the Mediterranean?” inquired the great historian and eminent member of the *École des Annales*, Fernand Braudel. «A thousand things together [...]. Not a civilisation, but a series of civilisations layered one atop the other. Travelling in the Mediterranean means meeting the world [...]. It means delving into the abyss of centuries [...] because the Mediterranean is an ancient crossroads. For millennia, everything has flowed here, complicating and enriching its history.”⁴

And not just the Mediterranean, but the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, too, at the crossroads with the Orient. These are essential spaces for Europe. As Alexander Pope wrote: “A sea unites the peoples it separates.”⁵

This is a decisive moment for our Union. We must reinvent and support our civilisation in a world that is undergoing rapid transformation, a multipolar international scenario in continuous evolution. In this context, university alliances can become the new connective tissue of Europe and convey its vital lymph.

It is time to remember the founding concepts of Europe and implement – twenty years after its signature – the main principles stated and shared with profound certainty by the Bologna Process, which reorganized the European university system to promote the development of an integrated European space for higher education, based on academic freedom, institutional independence, the participation of

³ President’s speech at University of Lund Sweden, Italy, *Europe: Together for the Future*. November 15, 2018.

⁴ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean. Space, History, Mankind, Traditions*, Bompiani, Milan, 1987.

⁵ A. Pope, *The Windsor Forest*, 1713, in P. Rogers (editor), *Selected Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

students and professors in the governance of higher education, social cohesion, the free circulation of students and professors, the development of a social dimension for higher education, a wider aperture and collaboration with higher education systems from around the world.

And this is the ambition of Civis. Its challenge is that of Europe, too. And its future, which is in our hands, must be bequeathed to the new generations to dissipate the legitimate and comprehensible preoccupation that the new generations do not believe in Europe; on the contrary, we are certain that they are already fully European.

I now leave the floor to the Honorary Rector of the University of Aix-Marseille, Prof. Yvon Berland, whom I thank for having promoted this alliance and who is currently responsible for its operative coordination.

Thank you for your kind attention.