

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

(Aachen, Germany)

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
UPON BEING PRESENTED THE  
INTERNATIONAL CHARLEMAGNE PRIZE 2000

Katschhof Courtyard

Aachen, Cathedral

Aachen, Germany

12.45 P. M.

THE PRESIDENT: Ladies and gentlemen, Chancellor Schroeder, Lord Mayor Linden, President Rau, President Havel, His Majesty Juan Carlos, President Halonen, previous laureates, members of the Charlemagne Foundation, leaders of the clergy and cathedral, and members of the German and American governments. Let me begin by thanking the Lord Mayor for his welcome and his wise words, and my good friend, Chancellor Schroeder for his kind comments and his visionary statement.

The rare distinction you have bestowed upon me I am well aware is in large measure a tribute to the role in American people have played in promoting peace, freedom and security in Europe for the last 50 years. I feel the honor is greater still because of the remarkable contributions made by previous recipients of this prize toward our common dream of European union.

Of course, as has already been said, that dream has its roots here in Aachen, an ancient shrine that remains at the center of what it means to be European – the seat of an empire, a place of healing waters, peace treaties, furious fighting. With its liberation at the end of World War II, Aachen became perhaps the first German city to join the postwar democratic order.

Today, as I have seen, Aachen is both a sanctuary for sacred relics, dating back to the dawn of Christianity, and a crucible of Europe's new information economy. Here, Charlemagne's name summons something glimpsed for the first time during his life – a sense that the disparate people of this Earth's smallest continent could actually live together as participants in a single civilization.

In its quest for unity, even at the point of a sword, and in its devotion to the new idea that there was actually something called Europa, the Carolingian idea surpassed what had come before, and to an extent, it guides us still.

Twelve centuries ago, out of the long, dark night of endless tribal wars, there emerged a light that somehow has survived all the ravages of time, always burning brighter, always illuminating Europe's way to the future. Today, that shining light of European Union is a matter of the utmost importance, not just to Europeans, but to everyone on this planet.

For Europe has shown the world humanity at its best and at its worst. Europe's most violent history was caused by men claiming the mantle of Charlemagne, men who sought to impose European union for their own ends without the consent of the people. History teaches, therefore, that European union, not to mention transatlantic

unity, must come from the considered judgement of free people and must be for worthy purposes that when threatened must be defended.

The creators of this prize and its first winners clearly understood that. We often say that theirs was the generation that rebuilt Europe after World War II. But actually, they did far more. They built the foundation of something entirely new – a Europe united in common commitment to democracy, free markets and the rule of law. That achievement endured for half a century, but only for half a continent.

Then, 11 years ago, the Berlin Wall fell, the Iron Curtain parted, and at last the prospect for a Europe whole and free opened before you. All of us will remember 1989 for the Wall crumbling to the powerful strains of Schiller's „Ode to Joy“. It was a moment of great liberation, like 1789 or 1848 – a particular triumph for the German people, whose own unification defied great adversity and set the stage for the larger unification of Europe.

Too often we forget that 1989 was also a time of grave uncertainty about the future. There were doubts about NATO's future, reinforced later by its slowness to confront evil in Bosnia and Croatia. There were fears that the EU's efforts to come closer together would either fail or, succeeding, would fatally divide Europe and the United States. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe feared becoming a gray zone of poverty and insecurity. Many wondered if Russia was headed for a communist backlash or a nationalist coup.

In January of 1994, I came to Europe for the first time as President, both to celebrate Europe's new birth of freedom and to build upon it. Then, I spoke of a new conception of European security, based not on divided defense blocs, but instead on political, military and cultural integration. This new security idea required, as has already been said, the transatlantic alliance to do for Europe's East what we did for Europe's West after World War II.

Together, we set about doing that. We lowered trade barriers, supported young democracies, adapted NATO to new challenges and expanded our alliance across Europe's old divide. We made clear, and I repeat today, that NATO's door remains open to new members. The EU took in three new members that opened negotiations with a dozen others, created a single market with one currency.

We've stood by Russia, struggling to build their own democracy and opened the way to a partnership between Russia and NATO and between Ukraine and NATO. We defended the values at the heart of our vision of an undivided Europe, acting to stop the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and forging what I believe will be an enduring peace there.

We acted in Kosovo in one of our alliance's finest moments. A year ago in Germany, we launched a Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe. We stand still with crusaders for tolerance and freedom from Croatia to Slovakia to Serbia, and we do encourage reconciliation between Turkey and Greece.

Over the last 11 years, of course, there have been some setbacks. But unquestionably, Europe today is more united, more democratic, more peaceful than ever, and both Europeans and Americans should be proud of that.

Think how much has changed. Borders built to stop tanks now manage invasions of tourists and trucks. Europe's fastest-growing economies are now on the other side of the old Iron Curtain. At NATO Headquarters the flags of 19 allies and 27 partners fly. In Central Europe and Eastern Europe, the realistic dream of membership in the EU and NATO has sparked the resolution of almost every old ethnic and border dispute. And, finally – finally – our friend, Vaclav Havel, has spent more years being President than he spent in prison.

In Southeastern Europe, the Bosnians are still fighting, but now at the ballot box. Croatia is a democracy. Soldiers from almost every European country, including bitter former adversaries, are keeping the peace together in Kosovo.

Last year, as German troops marched through the Balkan countryside, they were hailed as liberators. What a way to end the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the meantime, Russia has stayed on the path of democracy, though its people have suffered bitter economic hardships, political and criminal violence, and the tragedy of the war in Chechnya, which yet may prove to be self-defeating because of the civilian casualties. Still, it has withdrawn its troops from the Baltic states, accepted the independence of its neighbors, and completed the first democratic transition in its thousand-year history.

European unity really is producing something new under the sun – common institutions that are bigger than the nation-state, and at the same time, a devolution of democratic authority downward. Scotland and Wales have their own parliaments. This week, Northern Ireland, where my family has its roots, restored its new government. Europe is alive with the sound of ancient place names being spoken again – Catalonia, Piedmont, Lombardy, Silesia, Transilvania, Uthenia – not in the name of separatism, but in the spirit of healthy pride and heritage.

National sovereignty is being enriched by lively local voices making Europe safer for diversity, reaffirming our common humanity, reducing the chance that European disunity will embroil Europe and America in another large conflict.

One thing, thankfully, has not changed. Europe's security remains tied to America's security. When it is threatened, as it was in Bosnia and Kosovo, we, too, will respond. When it is being built, we, too, will always take part.

Europe's peace sets a powerful example to other parts of the world that remain divided along ethnic, religious and national lines. Even today Europe has internal disputes over fundamental questions of sovereignty, political power, and economic policy – disputes no less consequential than those over which people still fight and die in other parts of the world. However, instead of fighting and dying over them now, Europeans argue about them in Brussels, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.

The whole world should take notice of this. If Western Europe could come together after the carnage of World War II, if Central Europe could do it following 50 years of communism, it can be done everywhere on this Earth.

Of course, for all of the positive developments and our good feelings today, the job of building a united Europe is certainly not finished.