

## Opening Conference 30 years Treaty of Maastricht

*Mathieu Segers, 27 September 2022*

Excellencies, dear Executive Board of Maastricht University, dear director of dear colleagues, ladies, and gentlemen,

This autumn war is coloring European history for the umpteenth time.

This autumn we will commemorate that World War 1 ended a hundred-four years ago.

According to the great British historian Norman Davies, the outbreak of the First World War marks the beginning of a period of seventy-five years: the period during which Europe ‘was divided by’, what Davies has called, ‘the longest of Europe’s civil wars’ – lasting from 1914 until 1990.

The longest of Europe’s civil wars only ended in 1990 with the peace treaty with, and regarding, Germany. It was this treaty that put an end to the order of Yalta and Potsdam, and re-united Germany. But there was more to it. The peace treaty of 1990 also laid the foundations for the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Europe. And that historic reunification of Europe was facilitated by the process of European integration, and re-enshrined in the *Treaty on European Union*, signed in this city, the city of Maastricht, now almost 31 years ago.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2017, at the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Treaty of Maastricht, Federica Mogherini – then the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – gave a speech here in this very banquet-hall of the Province of Limburg.

In her speech Mogherini, concisely summed up the grand ambitions, which were put in writing back then, **and I quote her**: ‘The Treaty of Maastricht was a revolution: for the first time in the history of the world, building peace became the aspiration of an entire continent’.

Federica Mogherini is a child of the 1990s. She was born in 1973 and went to university in the early 1990s. In her speech, now five years ago, Mogherini recalled the spirit of that time, and said: ‘I remember very well the hopes of my generation at the end of the Cold War, the bold hopes and expectations for a “new global order”’. I remember this too, and many others in this room may remember it too ... Now that war is back in Europe, we may ask ourselves that uneasy question: Did we lose that spirit? What’s left of it? Which lessons should we draw from those past thirty years as the unforeseen circumstances of European history are so challenging and daunting again?

It was already in the year 1999 – that future-year, in which ‘The Artist Formerly Known as Prince’, threw the best party ever, at last ... – it was in that year, that the Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman asked a pressing question, **and I quote Bauman**:

‘how does it come about that human ability to imagine a better world was not among the trophies of victory?’

Bauman was referring to the unbelievable victory of 1990s, the unbelievable European victory over its own history. His question: why did we lose the ability to imagine a better world? Today this question is more relevant than ever.

Did we fool ourselves in Maastricht? – with the creation of European Economic and Monetary, that highly technocratic undertaking that seemed to enable us to push back the daunting history of European politics once more ... escaping history one last time ... revelling in comfort, efficiency, and the endless policies of upscaling ...

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is so many things at once, that it remains far too complex and multi-layered to be fully understood through efforts of the human brain – this is a truism for today’s Europe of European integration, just as it was a truism for all those Europe’s of the past.

But let’s focus on our Europe of European integration.

Some of the founders and shapers of this post-war Europe were among the first to fathom something of the endemic paradoxes at the very heart of contemporary Europe’s history.

These founders and shapers have come in many types and sorts, but they have one thing in common. Men like Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, and François Mitterrand, they knew that the Europe of welfare, security, and well-being – *l’Europe qui protège*, in their language – could only be built with a certain amount of imagination and ideas: ***une certaine idée de l’Europe***.

In their vision, a market alone doesn’t suffice. Quite on the contrary! A feel for the arts, and the art of politics in particular, comes closer to Europe’s basic needs in uncertain times.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now and then in Western Europe’s post-war history, self-confident men in **West** Germany, such as the chancellors Konrad Adenauer, Helmut Schmidt, and Helmut Kohl recognized the mystifying European calls from the other bank of the river Rhine. This was the seduction of reconciliation calling. Its language wrapped in speeches and personal letters. Its historical context: *die Schwierige Nachbarschaft Am Rhein*, in the words of the prominent speaker and eminent and seasoned ‘*Grenzganger*’, who will take the floor – here today – within a few minutes, after my opening words.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At these historic moments when Adenauer, Schmidt, and Kohl recognized the European calls from France as an opportunity for Franco-German reconciliation; at these historic moments of brilliant weakness, those German leaders transformed themselves into politicians of passionate European action.

Perhaps they did this, because they believed to see a glimpse of realism at an up to then invisible moral high ground – a strongly continentally coloured pan-European realism of a peculiar sort, romantic in nature, just in feeling; a realism that eclipsed statistics and cost-benefit calculations ... in the European politics of our times Angela Merkel and Olaf Scholz have been mimicking the best practices of these West-German European dinosaurs, but mostly without the pathos ...

Ladies and gentlemen,

The high hopes of the Europe of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been made explicit here in Maastricht, but they are visible now in Kiev not so much in Maastricht. Here in the heartland of the Europe of European integration they are not that visible anymore, neither in the media, nor in politics. Too few know about their existence.

Given this political reality, it is indeed very urgent that we start practicing what we have been preaching in the founding decades of European integration and in our European treaties – but now in a setting of war, escalating crises and growing European vulnerability and insecurity.

To do so, we must find new ways to safeguard the high hopes of human rights, the ideals of reconciliation, and the audacity of anti-totalitarianism on which the glory of the post-war West, and the European civilisation, thrive.

And in this we can no longer allow ourselves to wait and see, entrusting that our American partners will provide guidance and security, when need be, and lead the way. We must take the European future in our own hands; doing it in a European way, rooted in the lessons of history. Circumstances simply force us to do so.

I now will end my opening words with a few thoughts on European Economic and Monetary Union, that mega-project that was at the very heart of the Treaty of Maastricht and re-confirmed Franco-German friendship as the fundament of European integration in the post-Cold War-era.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is not only war that is back on our continent. The same is true for poverty and hunger; although these two were never away really ...

Back in the 1940s and 1950s, the founders of European integration saw the *Great Depression* of the 1930s, and the devastating inequality, nationalism, and racism it unleashed, as a key cause of the horrific violence which had raped Europe during the Second World War.

From this history they drew a very important conclusion: the battling of poverty in Europe ought to be at the core of their mission; that mission, which their American friends and partners summarized as 'building Europe', *malgré tout*.

What we may have forgotten now is that, in those days of the 1940s, the battle against poverty was also understood as a fight against unregulated capital markets. Or, in the words of Henry Morgenthau, the US Treasury Secretary in the early 1940s, **and I quote Morgenthau:**

the task that statesmen should set themselves is to 'drive the usurious money lenders from the temple of international finance. The institutions of a new international order ought to be 'instruments of sovereign governments and not of private financial interests'.

Indeed, capital controls would become the true and only backstop in the 'system' of Bretton Woods, that was created then, and would serve as securing framework in which the Europe of European integration could be build-up, while winning the confidence of its people by a pan-Western 'social contact' that has been characterised as 'Keynes at home, Smith Abroad'. A multilateral framework within which the *solidarité de fait* that Robert Schuman had promised, when he proposed the European Coal and Steel Community in May 1950, could be delivered.

In the Economic and Monetary Union and the Eurozone of today this essential part of the mission of 'building Europe' may be very relevant again. And the same might be true for the inter-linked battle against monopoly and oligarchy, and the vested interests and inequalities they nourish. These battles have been at the centre of the founding of European integration.

It is high time to re-recognize this part of contemporary European history. Maybe the NextGenerationEU, the EU-Recovery Fund can be a first step in this direction, also developing the still 'mainly empty' E of EMU: Economic Union.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is exciting and important that the City of Maastricht and the Province of Limburg together with Maastricht University seek ways to actively strengthen the scholarly work with regard to these very big and urgent questions for our Europe of today.

And that this effort has been recognized through the *European Heritage Label* which was awarded to the Treaty of Maastricht in 2018.

With today's conference and the two-day academic conference that will follow on Wednesday and Thursday, Maastricht University and its partners aim for the highest level of debate and discussion and strive for a better understanding of our Europe and its present, and so pressing, challenges.

On behalf of all the organisers: It is a great honour to welcome you all here to participate in this undertaking.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and a pleasure to now invite Prof. Dr. Joachim Bitterlich to give the Keynote Lecture of today. Professor Bitterlich is vice-president of the Jacques Delors Institute. But above all, he is a very experienced European Diplomat and ambassador. And Moreover: Joachim Bitterlich was at the epicentre of the coming about of the Maastricht Treaty, as a Zeitzeuge, as the yearlong and most important political advisor in European Affairs to Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

**May I invite you to come here, Professor Bitterlich**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**