

Jean-Claude Trichet: Europe – cultural identity – cultural diversity

Speech by Mr Jean-Claude Trichet, President of the European Central Bank, at the CFS Presidential Lecture, Center for Financial Studies, Frankfurt am Main, 16 March 2009.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I. Introduction

I was very touched by the invitation sent to me by the President of the Center for Financial Studies. He proposed that I give a lecture on “Europe – Cultural Identity – Cultural Diversity”. I was particularly moved for three reasons.

First, because it was an invitation from Prof. Otmar Issing, my dear friend, good companion and former colleague on the Executive Board of the European Central Bank. Together with the other members of the Executive Board, we have always been united in steering the bank towards price stability, in compliance with the Maastricht Treaty, and in an environment which was exceptionally demanding. And it still is – to say the least! These close working relationships form the remarkable team spirit which exists within the Executive Board.

But, and that is perhaps less well known, from time to time Otmar and I talked about Goethe’s poems, Heine’s “Lorelei” and about literature and poetry in general. He must have been thinking about these intense, even though short, poetry discussions when he rather unconventionally asked me, a fellow central banker, to give a lecture on European cultural diversity.

The second reason for being moved by the invitation is that the ECB regards Europe’s cultural diversity – which is fully reflected in the multinational character of its members of staff, who come from all 27 EU Member States – as a major asset. The ECB actively raises awareness of the cultural diversity of the European Union as one of the main elements of Europe’s cultural unity. It is the main purpose of the “Cultural Days”, which the ECB has been organising with great success for several years.

My third reason for welcoming the invitation to speak is because I am convinced that economic and cultural affairs, that money and literature and poetry, are much more closely linked than many people believe. There are a number of examples; let me give you three.

Firstly, we should recall that writing came into being in Sumer, the cradle of civilisation between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, 6000 years ago. Sumer’s administrators made a record of everyday items, of quantities, of transactions, on clay tablets. By recording these economic activities, these “proto-accountants” created the first documents in human history and paved the way for all of the world’s written literature.

Secondly, there is a relationship between poetry and money which has always struck me. Poems, like gold coins, are meant to last, to keep their integrity, sustained by their rhythm, rhymes and metaphors. In that sense, they are like money – they are a “store of value” over the long term. They are both aspiring to inalterability, whilst they are both destined to circulate from hand to hand and from mind to mind.

And thirdly, both culture and money, poems and coins belong to the people. Our currency belongs to the people of Europe in a very deep sense: it is their own confidence in their currency which makes it a successful medium of exchange, unit of account and store of value. Our culture is the wealth of literature and art that the confidence of the people has decided to select and preserve over time.

Today, I would like to reflect on Europe's cultural identity first by exploring a central concept, a spiritual core; then I'll review the remarkable diversity of its national cultures; and finally I'll consider how European cultural identity aspires to universality.

II. The search for a central concept in Europe's cultural identity

One way of shedding light on the cultural identity of Europe is to search for a central concept, a "heart" of Europe, which would simultaneously be both its source and summary. Two references are particularly enlightening in this respect: the vision of Paul Valéry, the poet and essayist, and that of Edmund Husserl, the philosopher.

Paul Valéry, in his essay "The European" ["L'Européen"], wrote in 1924: "Partout où les noms de César, de Gaius, de Trajan et de Virgile, partout où les noms de Moïse et de St Paul, partout où les noms d'Aristote, de Platon et d'Euclide ont eu une signification et une autorité simultanées, Là est l'Europe." Translated into English, this means: "Wherever the names Caesar, Gaius, Trajan and Virgil, wherever the names Moses and St. Paul, wherever the names Aristotle, Plato and Euclid have a significance and carry weight, that is where Europe is."

Valéry insists on the spiritual character of Europe by adding: "Il est remarquable que l'homme d'Europe n'est pas défini par la race, ni par la langue, ni par les coutumes mais par les désirs et par l'amplitude de la volonté (...). "In other words, "It is remarkable that the people of Europe are not defined by race, nor by language or customs, but by desires and breadth of will (...)."

We can indeed imagine, like Valéry, the cultural identity of Europe as being a remarkable expansion of the union, achieved under the Roman Empire, of Greek thought, Roman law and of the Bible, which has given rise to three monotheistic religions.

We could still go further in our search for Europe's conceptual heart. It is what Husserl proposes in his famous Vienna lecture of May 1935 entitled "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity". He sees the origin of the spiritual idea of Europe as being in Greece, where a handful of men initiated a radical conversion of all cultural life in their own nation and among their neighbours.

Let me quote Husserl in the original German version: "Es ist nun auch ersichtlich, dass von hier aus eine Übernationalität völlig neuer Art entspringen konnte. Ich meine natürlich die geistige Gestalt Europas. Es ist nicht mehr ein Nebeneinander verschiedener Nationen, die sich nur durch Handel- und Machtkämpfe beeinflussen, sondern: Es ist ein neuer Geist, von Philosophie und ihren Sonderwissenschaften herkommend; ein Geist, freier Kritik und Normierung auf unendliche Aufgaben hin, er durchherrscht das Menschentum, schafft neue, unendliche Ideale!"

I would translate this into English as follows: "One can also see that it's the starting point of a new kind of community, one which extends beyond nations. I am referring, of course, to Europe in a spiritual form. It is now no longer a number of different nations living alongside each other and only influencing each other through commercial competition or power struggles, but it is: a new spirit – stemming from philosophy and the sciences based on it – a spirit of free criticism, providing norms for infinite tasks, and it dominates mankind, creating new, infinite ideals."

Husserl says that Europe fully identifies with its Greek origins, in the spirit of philosophy. Thus, Europe's "crisis" comes from the apparent failure of rationalism. And he concludes his lecture, delivered in 1935, in a pointed, visionary way, without even naming totalitarianism, fascism or nazism: "Europe's existential crisis can end in only one of two ways: in its demise, alienated from its own rational sense of life, and lapsing into a hatred of the spirit and into barbarism; or in its rebirth from the spirit of philosophy, through a heroism of reason (...)."

Such returns to the sources of the “spiritual form of Europe” are necessary and enlightening. They give us powerful threads of the cultural identity of Europe across two millennia. That all the national cultures draw mainly – but not exclusively – on the same original sources largely explains the cultural unity of Europe over the course of time. But they can and must be complemented by an analysis of European national cultures themselves and of the close and complex relationships between these highly diverse cultures which ensure the cultural unity of Europe.

Cultural identity and unity amid the diversity of national cultures does not amount to the simple indefinite expansion of an original cultural core. I see Europe’s cultural identity as a tightly woven fabric. This fabric consists on the one hand of a warp thread carefully stretched, which corresponds to the many strong national cultures, which themselves have their own identity and find their origins in a distant past; on the other hand, there is the weft thread, which represents the interwoven transnational bedazzlement and admiration, the reciprocal influences crossing the frontiers between cultures and between languages. I imagine this literary, artistic, linguistic, European cultural fabric as drawing its beauty, its unity and its solidity from the sheer number and diversity of its threads.

III. The remarkable network of transfrontier cultural admiration and influence

To illustrate this, I would like to give you some striking examples, some moving testimonies of this admiration and of these “transfrontier” discoveries.

It will come as no surprise to you that, as I have been invited by the Center for Financial Studies of Frankfurt University, I’ll mention Goethe. He writes in “Dichtung und Wahrheit” about his discovery of Shakespeare: “Und so wirkte in unserer Straßburger Sozietät Shakespeare, übersetzt und im Original, stückweise und im ganzen, [...] dergestalt, dass, wie man bibelfeste Männer hat, wir uns nach und nach in Shakespeare festigten. Mehr und mehr bildeten wir die Tugenden und Mängel seiner Zeit, mit denen er uns bekannt macht, in unseren Gesprächen nach [...]. Das freudige Bekennen, dass etwas Höheres über mir schwebte, war ansteckend für meine Freunde, die sich alle dieser Sinnesart hingaben.“

Translated into English, he says that “Shakespeare, both in translation and the original, in excerpts and as a whole, became so great a force within our Strasbourg coterie that, just as some men are very well versed in Scripture, we gradually became well versed in Shakespeare. In our speech we imitated the virtues and vices of our time that he had shown us [...]. The joyful revelation that something sublime was hovering above me proved contagious to my friends, who all adopted my sentiment”.

Goethe translates Voltaire’s “Mahomet” and “Tancrède”, as well as “Rameau’s Nephew” by Diderot, which Schiller had passed on to him. In a letter to Schiller, Goethe says of Diderot’s work: “Die Bombe dieses Gesprächs platzt gerade in der Mitte der französischen Literatur.” In English, “This dialogue explodes like a bomb right at the very heart of French literature”. Because of Goethe, “Rameau’s Nephew” is famous in Germany long before it is in France!

Goethe’s influence on other cultures is itself extraordinary. The publication of “Werther” turned Europe upside down. It was one of the books Bonaparte took with him on his expedition to Egypt, and when he meets Goethe he wants to talk about it. Eckermann subsequently asks Goethe about that conversation with Bonaparte and says: “Napoléon pointed out to you a passage in “Werther” which, it appeared to him, would not withstand a thorough examination, and you say he’s right. I would like to know which passage he meant. –“Raten Sie!” [“Guess!”], said Goethe, with a mysterious smile.¹

¹ Goethe’s conversations with Eckermann (2 January 1824).

Eckermann, having suggested the passage in which Charlotte sends a pistol to Werther, notes that Goethe replies to him: "Ihre Bemerkung, ist freilich nicht schlecht. Ob aber Napoleon dieselbe Stelle gemeint hat oder eine andere, halte ich nicht für gut zu verraten." ["Your remark certainly isn't bad (...) but I don't think it is right to reveal whether Napoléon meant this passage or another".]

I find a moving testimony to this same European literary fabric of transnational and translinguistic admiration in the first phrase of the Chateaubriand's draft address to the Académie française – an address which was censored by Bonaparte himself: "When Milton published "Paradise Lost", no voice was raised in any of Great Britain's three kingdoms to praise a work that is one of the most beautiful monuments to the human spirit. The English Homer died forgotten, and his contemporaries left the task of immortalising the bard of Eden to future generations".

Dante Alighieri offers us another wonderful example of this influence and admiration which crosses time and space in Europe. "The Divine Comedy" exerts an extremely powerful fascination over its European readers. Five centuries after its creation, William Blake comments, in the margin of the translation of the Inferno by Henri Boyd: "The grandest poetry is immoral, the grandest characters wicked, very Satan : (...) Cunning and morality are not poetry but philosophy (...) Poetry is to excuse vice, and show its reason and necessary purgation."² Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" is strongly inspired by the work of Dante. More than 600 years after the "The Divine Comedy" Proust writes, when seeing a water lily in a small river: "[The lily] would drift over to one bank only to return to the other, eternally repeating its double journey (...) like one of those wretches whose peculiar torments (...) aroused the curiosity of Dante, who would have enquired of them at greater length from the victims themselves, had not Virgil (...) obliged him to hasten after him at full speed, as I must hasten after my parents."³

Let's move from Proust to Ismail Kadare, a contemporary writer. He writes that, as a schoolboy in Albania, he found himself at the age of 13 or 14 coming across "two groups of cantos (which) were quoted more often than the others in books, magazines, newspapers: those on Paolo and Francesca, the tragic lovers who didn't know any respite in the second circle of the Inferno and those on Count Ugolino in the ninth circle, who, famished, ended up eating his own children. According to Kadare, Dante's influence on popular Albanian culture is so strong that there are plenty of "Beatrices" in his country, "divided in equal proportions among Christians and Muslims in the civil registers".⁴

Dante brings to Italy the "terza rima", or triplet rhyme, which structures the poem in tercets closely linked to the preceding and following rhymes, so that a rhyme is never introduced that has not been framed by two earlier rhymes, with the exception of the first tercet of the canto. This new verse form – which creates an impression of fast, breathless movement, while offering the permanence of an unchangeable structure – was to be an instant success: Boccaccio and Petrarch adopted it immediately. Dante himself borrowed it from another language, Provençal: the "sirventès", a lyric form which goes back to the troubadours used the "terza rima" or triplet rhyme. It was another example of the felicitous influence of a crossover between two forms of vernacular language: Provençal and Italian.

But the extraordinary influence of Dante is perhaps not only explained by his genius and his verse technique. Other European influences may explain the emotional power of "The Divine Comedy". Thirty years before the birth of Dante, Boncompagno da Signa, a professor of

² William Blake "From the annotations to Henry Boyd's "A Translation of the Inferno of Dante Alighieri", Oxford Classics. Selected Poetry, page 138.

³ Proust, *La Recherche*, Du côté de chez Swann. Gallimard (1982).

⁴ Ismail Kadare, *Dante l'incontournable*, Fayard 2006 (translated from the Albanian by Tedi Papavrami).

rhetoric from Bologna, publishes the “Rhetorica Novissima”. In his chapter on memory, he adapts the classical “Art of Memory”⁵ – the technique utilised by the Greek and Roman orators to memorise their speeches – and transforms it into a powerful artificial memory of virtues and vices, of Paradise and Inferno. The historian Frances Yates comments that “The Divine Comedy” can be interpreted as a work embodying the contemporary adaptation of the classical “Art of Memory”. If we accept that interpretation, it is necessary to consider Dante as having been indirectly influenced by the founder of the “Art of Memory”, the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos, who also influenced the Latin authors – Quintilian and the unknown author of the “Rhetorica ad Herennium” – and subsequently the fathers of the church Saint Albertus Magnus and Saint Thomas Aquinas, and ultimately Boncompagno da Signa.⁶

Dante touches Europe’s collection of cultures today, seven centuries after writing “The Divine Comedy”. He himself indirectly drew the memory power of his poem from the Greek Simonides 18 centuries before. We can see how the cultural fabric of Europe extends over 25 centuries.

Following the course of a poetic metaphor down the centuries, across borders and between languages is another marvel of European culture. The same Simonides of Ceos writes: “For the soldiers who died at Thermopylae...hymns rather than tears, odes rather than wailing: a monument which neither rust nor devouring time could destroy”.

This metaphor of the poem as an “indestructible monument” was later used by Horace in his “Odes”: “I have completed a monument more lasting than bronze and far higher than that royal pile of pyramids which the rain cannot destroy, nor the endless sequence of years or the swift passing of time (...)”. The metaphor was also used by Ovid, Boccaccio, Ronsard, and by du Bellay in “Les antiquités de Rome”, which was translated by Spenser as “The Ruins of Rome” and which inspired Shakespeare to write in his magnificent sonnet 55: “Not marble, nor the gilded monuments / Of Princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme”. This beautiful sonnet deals with the immortality of the person loved, of the feelings she inspires and of the unchanging nature of the poem itself. Its central metaphor dates back two thousand years to Simonides, and has travelled down the centuries and across the frontiers of the Greek, Latin, Italian, French and English languages. There is no finer example of the numerous threads that form the very fabric of European culture. This weave, this “indestructible monument” made of words, spanning time and space, from Simonides to du Bellay and Shakespeare, is Europe’s cultural unity!

The writer Cees Nooteboom in “De ontvoering van Europa” [The Abduction of Europe] gives his personal interpretation of Europe’s cultural unity and diversity: “If I am European – and I hope I am starting to get there after almost 60 years of determined effort – this surely means that Europe’s multiculturalism profoundly influences my Dutch identity”.

Isn’t this what being European is all about? We must fully assume our national cultural identity, not only because it is the foundation of our own intellect and sensitivity, but also because Europe’s rich cultural variety and its national roots are what make it unique. It is this huge cultural endowment, with all its diversity, that gives Europeans their European identity.

European-ness means being unable to understand fully my national literature and poetry – Chateaubriand, Mallarmé, Julien Gracq, St John Perse, Senghor – without understanding Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe and Heine. European-ness means that I share with all other Europeans the same basic cultural sources, despite the fact that they come from vastly differing backgrounds. This means that I live in a modern literary atmosphere that is influenced directly and indirectly by the Czech Kafka, the Irishman Joyce and the Frenchman

⁵ “The Art of Memory”, Frances Yates, Routledge and Kegan, 1966.

⁶ Albertus Magnus, “Opera omnia”. Saint Thomas Aquinas, “Summa Theologiae”. Boncompagno da Signa, “Rhetorica Novissima”. Quoted by Frances Yates, “The Art of Memory”.

Proust. And as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset wrote in his “Revolt of the Masses” in 1930, “Si hoy hiciésemos balance de nuestro contenido mental – opiniones, normas, deseos, presunciones – notaríamos que la mayor parte de todo eso no viene al francés de su Francia, ni al español de su España, sino del fondo común europeo”. I would translate this into English as follows: “If we were to take an inventory of our mental stock today – opinions, standards, desires, assumptions – we should discover that the greater part of it does not come to the Frenchman from France, nor to the Spaniard from Spain, but from the common European stock.”

Writing about the unity of Europe, the historian Braudel mentioned what he termed the “unités brillantes” (“bright unities”), distinguishing them from the “unités aléatoires” (“uncertain unities”). The “unités brillantes” cover all fields of artistic and intellectual endeavour, not only poetry, literature and philosophy but also music, painting, sculpture and architecture. It is no coincidence that the Governing Council of the European Central Bank chose European architectural styles to illustrate the banknotes of our single currency, the euro. It is amazing to see how widespread these styles are in Europe, with countless buildings, churches and monuments built in the Romanesque, Gothic, baroque and classical traditions. These architectural styles were born in very different areas of Europe, and demonstrate Europe’s cultural richness. They also provide another powerful illustration of this unique concept of unity within diversity, which is the central trait of our continent.

IV. The cultural activities of the European Central Bank

I’d like now take a look at the art and cultural activities of the ECB. In view of our allegiance to the European ideal and its leitmotif of “unity in diversity”, we aim, through our activities beyond those relating to monetary policy, to help further Europeans’ understanding of one another and to raise awareness of the cultural wealth of Europe and its common cultural roots.

Our goal is to bring the people of the Rhine-Main area, our visitors and our staff closer to the cultural diversity of the EU Member States and thus enable them to deepen their knowledge of what they have in common and what binds them together. It is also an aim of the ECB to encourage cooperation and exchanges within the European System of Central Banks, also in the area of cultural activities.

In doing this, we concentrate on two areas of activity: first, the ECB has presented exhibitions of contemporary art since 1997. Once a year we hold an exhibition at our main building in Frankfurt providing insights into the contemporary art scene of one Member State of the EU. Each exhibition presents works from the fields of painting, drawing, print, installation, photography and sculpture by some 20 artists. The exhibitions are organised in collaboration with the national central bank of the country in question and generally also include works from its collection. The exhibitions regularly provide the ECB with the opportunity to purchase works for its own collection, so exhibitions and the formation of a collection go hand in hand. To date the ECB has presented 15 countries and also hosted three special exhibitions dedicated exclusively to the collections of central banks. These showed works from the collections of, in 2006, the Oesterreichische Nationalbank, in 2006/07 the Federal Reserve Board, and in 2008, for the tenth anniversary of the European System of Central Banks, 18 central banks in Europe. The ECB’s collection currently comprises 170 works by 75 artists and is shown in the ECB’s three buildings. The ECB offers regular tours of the exhibitions and the collection, for example on the corporate collections weekend held by the state of Hesse.

Second, the ECB has held the “Cultural Days of the ECB” since 2003. This event also takes place once a year, focuses on a particular Member State of the EU, and is organised in cooperation with the national central bank of the featured country. The programme provides a broad-ranging look at the cultural scene in the country and usually includes readings, concerts, films, theatre and dance performances, lectures and exhibitions. The events are

mostly held outside the ECB and in cooperation with cultural institutions in Frankfurt – such as the Alte Oper, the Literaturhaus, the Deutsches Filmmuseum or the Mouson-Turm. In the last six years we have presented 198 events and 158 artists and ensembles, from promising newcomers and talented young artists, such as the Polish pianist Joanna Marcinkowska, to international greats such as the Nobel prize-winning Hungarian author Imre Kertész or the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki, who have helped to shape the cultural legacy of the twentieth century.

Our present art and cultural activities offer many examples of the unity in diversity that makes up Europe's cultural identity. Let me give you only three examples of contemporary artists who illustrate very well the dense fabric of trans-frontier admiration and influence:

Our collection includes two works by the Austrian painter Hubert Scheibl, one of the best-known representatives of the new abstraction of the 1990s. His works allude to the romantic landscape painting which reached its apogee in nineteenth century Europe in the work of J.M.W. Turner and Caspar David Friedrich. Like these artists before him, Scheibl attempts to capture the spirit of a mystical, pantheistic experience of nature. He too makes reference to the idea of the sublime – to experiences which are too overwhelming for our senses to be able to take in, in their entirety – to a concept which, since the eighteenth century, has recurred, time and again, in the works of philosophers such as Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Jean-François Lyotard. In the twentieth century the concept of the sublime primarily shaped European and American abstract expressionism, to which Scheibl's works – with their subtly nuanced fields of colour and subjective gestures – are related.

A second example would be the reading with literature Nobel laureate Imre Kertész, which was one of the high points of the Cultural Days dedicated to Hungary in 2005. The work of Kertész is embedded in the literary and intellectual history of the twentieth century like no other. At the centre of his works is the holocaust, which he sees as an indelible caesura in human history and which he puts at the heart of European history and modern existence. The descriptions of his protagonists are informed by the writings of Arthur Rimbaud and Jacques Lacan on split identities and multiple personalities. Rimbaud's phrase "Je est un autre" was even used by Kertész as the basis for the title of his memoirs "I – Another: chronicle of a metamorphosis" which appeared in 1997. To earn a living under the communist regime in Hungary, Kertész translated works by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Arthur Schnitzler, Joseph Roth and Elias Canetti, all of whom had a lasting influence on his thinking. In "Galley Diary", a collection of observations, aphorisms and philosophical excursions which appeared in 1992, Kertész engages directly with great thinkers and poets of the twentieth century. In an internal dialogue with them he attempts to find the definitive answers to the holocaust and modernity, totalitarianism and freedom. Kertész cites as further inspirations popular literature such as penny-dreadfuls as well as Gustave Flaubert, with whom he shares a belief in the written word as the only truth.

Finally, I would like to look at the medium of film. In line with the European focus of the last Cultural Days, we showed Lars von Trier's internationally award-winning 1991 film "Europa". Von Trier is one of the best-known film-makers of the modern age. His most important sources of inspiration include literature and classics of European and American cinema history. He has a fascination for the dark and mysterious moods which mark the stories of Franz Kafka and Joseph Conrad, both of whom inform his "Europa" in a very tangible way: the basic idea for the film was based on Kafka's fragment "America" (1911-14) and Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" (1899). In particular his early works – to which "Europa" belongs – are clearly influenced by German expressionist film of the 1920s, Italian neo-realism of the 1940s and the contemporaneous "film noir" which emerged in the United States. Thus, in "Europa", von Trier's images and stylistic renderings allude to the main representatives of these decades: Fritz Lang, Alfred Hitchcock and Roberto Rossellini.

Of course, there are many other revealing interrelationships within European culture to be discovered in our rich treasure trove of art exhibitions and Cultural Days programmes. We will remain committed to promoting cultural exchanges within Europe in the future and greatly look forward to the insights and experiences which the Romanian Cultural Days later this year will bring.

V. The aspiration of European culture to universality

Have we exhausted the deep significance and the rich cultural identity of Europe once we have identified its sources and got the measure of its remarkable diversity, with its tight weave of influences, of relationships and of mutual admiration extending beyond national frontiers and linguistic barriers? Doesn't European culture have another fundamental characteristic that makes it unique among the world's cultures?

Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher, phrases the question this way in "L'autre Cap"⁷: "On peut aimer à se rappeler qu'on est un intellectuel européen sans vouloir l'être de part en part. Se sentir européen entre autres choses, est-ce être plus ou moins européen ? Les deux sans doute (...)." In other words, "It's nice to remind yourself that you are a European intellectual without wanting to be it through and through. To feel European among other things, does it mean being more, or less, European? Both, without doubt."

It's precisely because Europe has been gradually built on the basis of a sincere and deep-seated recognition of its cultural diversity that it aspires to be universal. Its cultural unity does not mean confinement, introspection or isolation inside a cultural "fortress". An integral part of its culture is its admiration and insatiable curiosity about the abundance of cultures beyond its shores.

In the same text Derrida also says: "Comment assumer une responsabilité contradictoire qui nous inscrit dans une sorte de double bind: se faire les gardiens d'une idée de l'Europe, d'une différence de l'Europe qui consiste précisément à ne pas se fermer sur sa propre identité et à s'avancer exemplairement vers ce qui n'est pas elle, vers l'autre Cap (...)" To put it in English: "We need to accept a conflicting responsibility which puts us in a kind of double bind: to become the guardians of a concept of Europe and of Europe's distinctiveness, which consists not of closing oneself to one's own identity but of moving in an exemplary way towards precisely what is not one's own identity, towards the 'Other Cape'."

Europe's deep aspiration to universality is expressed in a particularly ambitious way by Husserl in the same lecture in Vienna that I mentioned earlier. He talked about "a spirit of free criticism...of creating new, infinite ideals...", and he added that "...there are some ideals that exist for individuals in their nations, and other ideals for the nations themselves. But, ultimately, there are also infinite ideals for the spreading "synthesis" of nations, and in that synthesis each of these nations gives its best to its partner nations precisely by aiming for its own ideal task in a universal spirit".⁸

Is it not remarkable that, at a global level, UNESCO refers to cultural diversity using words similar to those used by the European Union itself to promote its cultural diversity? Let us compare the two texts.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, "L'autre Cap", Liber, revue européenne des Livres 1990. Raison d'Agir Editions.

⁸ The German original reads as follows. "Es sind solche für die einzelnen Menschen in ihren Nationen, solche für die Nationen selbst. Aber schließlich sind es auch unendliche Ideale für die sich ausbreitende Synthese der Nationen, in welcher jede dieser Nationen gerade dadurch, dass sie ihre eigene ideale Aufgabe im Geiste der Unendlichkeit anstrebt, ihr Bestes den mitvereinten Nationen schenkt."

Article 151 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, which incorporates Article 128 of the Treaty of Maastricht, states: “The Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore”.

Compare this with part of the preamble to UNESCO’s Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions: the General Conference of UNESCO is “Conscious that cultural diversity forms a common heritage of humanity and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all”.

How does this diversity and universality, on which European unity is based, apply to the European Central Bank? Diversity is reflected, as I have already mentioned, by the fact that 27 nationalities are represented within the ECB, forming a single group and making a major contribution to our shared success. The ECB’s Governing Council itself represents a formidable example of diversity and unity. Together, we all fulfil our role of guiding Europe’s monetary team, the Eurosystem, consisting of the ECB and the 16 euro area national central banks, each with their own culture, language and history. And together with the 27 national central banks we make up the European System of Central Banks. We embrace this rich diversity, and it forms an integral part of our identity.

We also aspire to universality. We are open to the world and in close contact with institutions on other continents. We aim to play as active a role as possible in the international financial institutions and international informal groups to which we belong, we always support a multilateral approach. We greatly value our discussions with central banks on other continents, and particularly the regular meetings of the Eurosystem with central banks in Asia, Latin America and the Mediterranean region.

As my final point, we are united because we have the eminent responsibility under the Maastricht Treaty as guardians of Europe’s single currency. Because Economic and Monetary Union is a magnificent undertaking that forms the basis of Europe’s prosperity and shared stability. And because the single currency is an emblem of Europe’s unity. The experience we have gained in this Economic and Monetary Union, based on the free will of the Member States, is exemplary in today’s globalised world that is rapidly integrating. It’s also why we are pleased to engage in close cooperation with institutions on other continents that are observing the ECB and the Eurosystem and thinking about the lessons they can draw from Europe’s unique experiences.

I would like to end by quoting the philosopher and writer Ernest Renan, who defined a nation’s identity as follows: “In the past, it was a heritage of glory and of regrets to share together; in the future, it will be the same programme to be realised...”.⁹ Europe has more than its fair share of past glory and regrets, and possesses a deep cultural unity in its diversity. The single currency is an essential part of this “programme to be realised”. We shall continue to offer the euro as a unique and irreplaceable anchor of stability and trust. In the present very difficult circumstances it is more important than ever. Europe can rely on us to preserve that anchor.

Thank you for your attention.

⁹ “Dans le passé un héritage de gloire et de regrets à partager; dans l’avenir un même programme à réaliser.”, Ernest Renan, “Qu’est ce qu’une nation?” 1882.