Panel 26: Die Zukunft Europas: Integration, Dialog, Kreativität
Panel 26: The Future of Europe. The capacity to Integrate, for Dialogue and to Generate

Identity is always in a state of flux. Identity is a process: a process of reassurance, not of certainty; of curiosity, not of knowledge; of relationships, not of selfishness. But any identity needs anchor points to which it can be secured and attached.
For me, such a fixed anchor of my own, but also of an European identity are the Holy Scriptures, the foundation of our Christian faith.

For example, the Letter to the Ephesians shows how Jesus builds up his church: "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us" (Eph 2, 14). Christ is our peace, he breaks down the fences between the near and far. He is the cornerstone on which the house is built in which we live: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Eph. 2, 19f).

Jesus has a clear and unambiguous message: the fences must fall. This implies for us Christians that Europe's future must be one that overcomes estrangement and separation. Jesus taught and lived to accept foreigners and refugees as a part of ourselves. If we follow him in this, we can overcome alienation and exclusion. Europe
needs to expand its capacity to integrate and it must be ready for dialogue among its citizens as well as with strangers. Europe has the capacity for reconciliation.

Europe has always been a project that fosters the respect for different cultures, different religions and the different thinking. We seem to have lost that lately. Therefore, we should recommit ourselves, we should recollect once more, who and what we are. Let me therefore reaffirm some anchor points of our European identity that are important for Europe’s future:

I. **Reconciliation as the Foundation of European Identity**
Foundation of the European identity is the reconciliation that has taken place between victims and perpetrators, between enemy nations after the crimes and horrors of WW2. The conciliatory attitude of people made possible a coexistence of different European cultures, a reconciled diversity, which is characterized by mindfulness, which recognizes differences and which accepts the dignity of all people as a common value. We have to affirm these values for the sake of Europe’s future. And we should not reduce our spiritual and intellectual values to the material values of an economic communion with a common market and a common currency.

II. **Europe: Not a Geographical, but a Cultural Entity**
Europe is more a cultural than a geographical entity. Europe is a community of values. It owes to a plurality of influences: Christianity in its various forms, Jewish heritage and also the influence of Islamic scholars.

Europe has strong Christian roots, but also many others. Ancient philosophy and culture were conveyed to us by Muslim scholars. Without the Age of Enlightenment there would be neither human rights nor political freedom in our continent today. As a result, in Europa spiritual and intellectual diversity is program.

But we do not defend these values by upholding the ideal conception of a Christian Europe. Europe is no longer a Christian continent. Christianity is stronger in other continents than Europe. Here considerable parts of the population have turned away from Christianity. However, this is absolutely no reason to deny the still existing formative force of Christianity in Europe. Still Christians are the predominant majority here. One does not do justice to this fact if one lapse into a flat lamentation about secularization.

III. **Europe: The Spirit of Diversity as a program**
Diversity is Europe’s program: Europe owes to the Greek the spirit of philosophy, the dawn of science, the openness to the arts. An inheritance, by the way, which came to us in a considerable extent via medieval Islam. To the Romans, Europe owes the foundation of its legal system and a sense of political unity. Jerusalem, finally, brought Europe the Bible, the defining religion and the dominant image of the relation between
God and man. Christianity emerged from Judaism. The Christian Bible includes the Hebrew Bible. Europe, European countries, European people are different, diverse and that's a good thing. At the same time we always have to search what makes us a community.

IV. Unity in Diversity: Human Dignity – The Individual and the Community
In former times, but also today Christians in Europe stand up for values that always have marked the continent: for the perception of nature as creation, for the glory of God, for the dignity of mankind. Central to these core values is the inviolable human dignity and the human rights that are derived from it. This is a religious insight in response to the biblical message that man is God's image. This implies for our times the fundamental equality of all. For years the EU has been enlarged. This was the right thing to do. But we Europeans have forgotten to deepen its common identity in view of those values, which I have just mentioned. The EU derives its identity from its Judeo-Christian values, the EU values those ideas even in a secularized form, thus it can integrate atheists and doubters and is open for the stimuli of other religions, which are based on the same set of values.

Europe has generated an image of mankind, which can be characterized by the balance of individuality and sociality, of freedom and responsibility. Each one of us is an individual, but not locked in oneself. Rather, each one of us is dependent on the relationship with others and open to God. We need a culture that respects the inviolable dignity of every single person and thus balances the needs and rights of the individual and the imperative of community.

V. Human Dignity Calls for the Protection of the Persecuted
The concept of the inviolability of human dignity, to which we are committed in Europe, is also reflected in the fact that we cannot resign ourselves to situations where people are deprived of any rights. Such lawlessness is often caused by political circumstances. Therefore, our legal systems protect politically persecuted persons and refugees. We need a right of asylum, which corresponds to the idea of inviolable human dignity. Together we have to resist a mindset that discriminates against minorities and excludes foreigners. This is also an important dimension of our European community of shared values.

We need a process of reciprocal integration of old residents and new citizens. We need a new attitude that expects to find in the other person something lacking in ourselves. And in order to do so we also have to understand what defines us and the others are missing and lacking. The global migration will transform Europe. It has already begun. Christians can help to shape these changes. Empowered by the Word of God which calls into our hearts: Do not fear! Do not be afraid of the stranger, not of the changes, not of your own fears.

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These are anchor points of a European identity – others could be mentioned. In all this it is central for us Christians to follow Christ. He is the one who called and visited people nobody else wanted to be in contact with. With him we can learn: The diversity of our lives and our cultures is our wealth – not a weakness that must be overcome. He is our anchor, who says:

“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me …Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Matthew 25: 34-40; 45).