

Opening speech at the Strasbourg Conference 2010

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Honorable Members of Parliament,

Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is again a great privilege for me to present some words of welcome to all of you. Like myself, many of you have taken part in our previous conferences in Berlin, Brussels and Tokyo. But some of you are new guests who are also prepared to do their best in the effort to support democratization worldwide. Our past conferences have proved to be milestones in international relations, at least if we regard the meetings as a world congress of non-governmental lighthouses. As for the present meeting, I can inform you that participants from about 25 countries will share our common aims during the forthcoming two days of conference.

Twenty years have passed since communism broke down in Europe. There are no more disturbances in the East-West relations. The so-called Cold War has been overcome and there are no proxy wars.

At the moment, the world is looking forward to the great worldwide Soccer tournament organized to take place – for the first time ever - on African soil. This peaceful competition of the best soccer teams of the world very aptly reflects the common notion that we are all sitting in the same boat, no matter whether we live in Europe, Asia or Africa. When looking for new horizons we should always bear in mind this concept of one world for all of us. Strasbourg, this year's venue of our conference, seems to be a very suitable choice in this context. It was in 1949 that Strasbourg was declared to be the home of the newly founded Council of Europe and it was also here that, in 1952,

the first European Parliament was established. Now, more than 50 years later, 47 European states work in and for the council of Europe including Russia and some of the former satellites of the erstwhile Sowjet Union. 30 countries send representatives to the European parliament which, in the meantime, has asserted, step by step, typical parliamentary rights such as accepting the governing board or passing laws.

Strasbourg as a city has not always been regarded as a prominent place in Europe. Originally it was a small town within the Holy Roman Empire (of German Nation). Occupied by France in 1681, it was repeatedly shifted from Germany to France and vice versa in the following centuries. The religion was Roman Catholic and later on Protestant, the language was either German or French. As a consequence of all of this the people of the city had to suffer from wars, famine or suppression. But today Strasbourg is a symbol of the peaceful cooperation and coexistence of different people.

I shortly referred to these historical and present-day facts in order to promote our common endeavors towards a new world without suppression and without war. Having lived very closely to the former Iron curtain - which was broken down without any shedding of blood, just by positive ideas and good will on both sides - I am totally convinced that even in Asia, and also in China, the future will be one of peaceful competition of political ideas, of plurality of political parties and of steadfast democrats in every country. This will be no self-fulfilling prophecy. Many people have to work for this aim, have to fight for it, have to convince other people that in the 21st century mankind has its greatest chance of achieving a secure world being founded on unswervingly democratic fundamentals. Let us focus all our energy on this great aim. At least here in our conference, we have the opportunity to present our free ideas and to look for new horizons. – Thank you all.