Speech upon Receiving the Honorary Doctorate

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“Señor Presidente Prof. Dr. Lenzen:
Señor Decano Prof. Dr. Ehlers:
Señora Profesora Dra. Braig:
Señor Profesor Dr. Pforte:
Mis queridos amigos Carlos Rincón y José María Pérez Gay:
Señoras y señores:

Quisiera, antes de pasar al inglés, agradecer en mi propia lengua, el español, esta altísima distinción que me otorga la Freie Universität de Berlín.

El Doctorado Honoris Causa en Filosofía con el que me distingue esta casa de estudios constituye una liga más entre las culturas hispanoparlantes de Europa e Iberoamérica y la gran cultura germanoparlante de Europa, tan unida a la nuestra porque nuestra literatura y nuestro pensamiento han abrevado constantemente en los surtidores de Goethe y de Schiller, de Heine y de Fontane, de Musil y de Mann.

Evoco, en particular, la lectura que Thomas Mann hizo del Quijote al cruzar por primera vez el Atlántico en 1935. Qué significativo que Mann haya escogido a Cervantes para llegar al Nuevo Mundo. Sabía sin duda que el nuestro es el Territorio de la Mancha, el conjunto de las literaturas en lengua castellana, lengua de la Mancha, manchada, impura, mestiza y, por eso, fecunda.

El año entrante celebramos el IV Centenario de la publicación del Quijote, fuente de la novela moderna por su mezcla de géneros, su libertad de imaginación y, sobre todo, su incertidumbre radical y antidogmática: incertidumbre autoral, de personajes, de lenguajes.

Quiero ver en la lectura del Quijote por Thomas Mann un anuncio de mi propia lectura de Mann como una invitación a fundar la realidad en la imaginación a fin de que la realidad gane poderes inéditos.

Seguramente, al cruzar el Atlántico Thomas Mann iba acompañado no solo de Cervantes, sino de Goethe, el europeo universal que nos regaló otro territorio: el de la literatura mundial, la weltliteratur como un concepto incluyente de la gran reserva de palabras con las que las mujeres y los hombre damos nombre a nuestra inacabada historia.

Muchas gracias.”
“The Extreme West” – “l’extreme occident”. So has the French diplomat and historian Alain Rouquié named Latin America.

And what does extreme mean?
The most advanced in either direction, says the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language. Even more precise and generous, our own Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy offers the word –extreme– the double virtue of being not only an end, out a beginning as well.

In this sense, we can think that if Latin America is the extreme of Europe, Europe is also the extreme of Latin America.

Why?
Because out of the encounter of the European an Indo-American worlds in 1492, as out of the arrival of negritude in the New World a bit later, flowed a current of influence and mutual recognitions.

Clash of civilizations? Catastrophic encounter?
No, says the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, whose 100th anniversary we are celebrating this year, no, if from the clash is born something that transcends the clash. And from the encounter of the ancient civilizations of the Americans and the civilizations of Europe we were born, all of us.

The majority of us speak Spanish and Portuguese.
The majority of us are mestizo, that is, not only Indian, Black or European but also, most of us, Indoeuropean or Afroeuropean.
And even when we are atheists, we are Catholics.

This confluence is due in great measure to the fact that the principal colonial power in South and Central America was Spain, the most multicultural nation of Europe, Phoenician, Greek and Latin, Celtic and Iberian, Germanic, Arab and Jewish Spain.

That is: from Mexico to Chile and Argentina, we are heirs to a multicultural Europe which, in joining Indoamerica and Afroamerica, gave the whole world a new pluralistic frontier, in effect an extreme of mutual recognitions, a wider mirror in the gallery of identities brought by Europe to the New World.

Out of this vast encounter of civilizations grew a question as pertinent today as it was then and always will be:
How do we place ourselves in the world?
This is a question each one of us asks him or herself personally. But it is also a collective question.

Karl Jaspers states that the freedom of the world is only fully accomplished in a community.

Today, when Europe and Latin America attempt a closer relationship, when we both, Europeans and Latin Americans, break out of the limits of narrow nationalism, we recognize ourselves in the Latin wisdom of Terence –“Nothing human is alien to me”– and in the Mexican wisdom of
Alfonso Reyes –“Let us be generously universal in order to be profitably national”– as well as in the German wisdom of Herder–shared by Goethe– of a “chain of culture” joining together all the peoples of the human race.

Underlying these words are the questions of identity and diversity.

The question of identity has troubled both Europeans and Latin Americans. We, because since we obtained independence from Spain in the early 19th Century until we arrived at interdependence at the end of the 20th Century, we have been asking ourselves who we are and how do we place ourselves in modernity. From Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in Argentina to Octavio Paz in Mexico, the debate was not sterile. It allowed us to assimilate our pluricultural inheritance We descend from European, Indian and African cultures that identify us as mestizos in world of such vast movements of labor, migration, trade, production, communications, that our own multicultural, mestizo personality has become, in itself, synonymous to the modernity we have so much striven for.

But Europe, also, has lost its ancestral hubris, struck by the horrors of two World Wars, totalitarian rule and the sunset of colonialism. The world is no longer Eurocentric.

The experience of evil drove Europe to renew the springs of its shared identities most and its generous sense of solidarity.

We are now both in the same situation: that of bringing out the best in us if we are to live in a co-responsible universe.

We are both separated and enjoined by new realities, new obligations.

I believe we can say, on both sides of the Atlantic, that we known who we are. Identity is no longer a problem.

But identity has come at a price.

We have known failures.

We have known successes.

But we have also learn that in history there are no definitive failures or successes.

And this is so because we are all subject to the political and personal variabilities so lucidly explained by Machiavelli, the exemplary thinker of the pros and cons of his own propositions.

Necessity, says Machiavelli, can be determined by nefarious ways–la via scelerata— but also by the positive stimulus towards political action.

Virtue is implicit in necessity. Virtue is free will in action. And sometimes we tend to forget that Machiavelli believes in freedom and offers us one of the most beautiful statements on the subject:

“No one can take from us that minimal and glorious parcel of freedom that God has given each human being”, he writes in The Prince.

And lastly, there is fortune, uncertain, fickle, varying. A great French scientist, Jacques Monod, Nobel-prize winner for Medicine in 1965,
speaks of fortune in the terms of hazard and necessity. We want to believe ourselves as necessary and desperately deny our own contingency, warns Monod. Chance arrives to warn us about the degree to which we are all variable and contingent. The compromise between hazard and necessity takes place in history and determines the nature and degree of freedom.

Freedom, as Kant foresaw and history daily demonstrate, for both good and evil. Evil itself, then, as a dimension of liberty. How to assure that good shall be the best choice of freedom?

History asks a question of every human being in every age. How do we take our place in the world?

We can only approximate an answer if we accept, first, that there is a world created by humanity… but also a humanity created by the world.

For a writer, the problem is posed in every single line. Writing in the present, we can not avoid the presence of memory, which is the past, or of desire, which is the future.

The writer, up to a certain point, solves the problem by bestowing language with the power of constituting a world.

To name things is to endow them with remembrance, with both limits and avenues, with both past and future as presence.

This demonstrates two things.

One, that the past is never over in the measure that the past also had a present and imagined a future.

The other, that the future never truly ends, because it is, in the words of the great Spanish philosopher Emilio Lledó, so closely linked to Heidelberg University, “a horizon of will”.

We would have to lose will in order to end history.

But painful as history might be, Nietzsche reminded us, the loss of history would be more painful still.

The task of the historian, says Carmen Iglesias of Madrid’s Royal Academy, the task of the historian is not to close time present but to maintain open future time.

But that demands, wrote Martin Buber, that we share “a community of memory”.

I quote these words because Europe and Latin America relate to each other as pluralistic cultures and subjects of history –that is, of both memory and desire rooted in the present.

We both know who we are.

We both have long memories and desires yet to be fulfilled.

We have both suffered much from geographic fatalities.

But to submit to fatalism would be a cowardly fault.

True, we choose our friends –we do not choose our families of our neighbors.
Latin America shares the Western Hemisphere with the world’s most powerful nation. We must live with the United States and fruitfully exchange with them cultural, economic and labor values. But to co-exist we must know to negotiate, with ability and with dignity, fully knowing that at times Washington would like instant support, failing to understand that to disagree is not to threaten, but to enlighten.

What we can not do is to simply say yes to all of their policies, especially when they contravene international law.

With Europe, Latin America does not have any fatalities or tensions.

We look towards Europe because the prevalent economic model here is superior to the supposedly universal one that has perpetuated inequality in Latin America. Voodoo economics, as Bush père once called it, faithful to the trickledown theory. Well, we have been living with savage capitalism since the 19th Century and are still waiting for things to trickledown. They have not. In a joint statement this very month, Enrique Iglesias of the Inter American Development Bank and Chris Patten, the European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, stress that 45% of Latin Americans live in a “morally unacceptable” state of poverty and warn Europe that the degree of social exclusion in Iberoamerica is “unsustainable”.

Yes, we look towards Europe.
We look at the statistics which are not bad but could be better.
We are trading $92 billion dollars worth of goods annually, two-ways.
European investment in Latin America stands at eleven and a half billion dollars yearly.
Europe accounts for 40% of all international cooperation in Latin America.

Good and well. May all of these factors grow in coming years.
Yet effective cooperation is not a one-way street.
It demands deep reforms and better governance in Latin America itself.

We must depend less on foreign investment and assistance and attempt policies of growth not only from the top down, but especially from the bottom up.
Our greatest wealth is our human capital, numerous, intelligent, hard-working.

Have we employed it fully and well?
No, we have not.

Many of our laborers leave our countries not only because they lack work, but because they lack security –because we have not fully constructed states based of legality– because we have still to defeat corruption, which is the best way of stealing from the poor.
So, I am not shying away from our own obligations: charity begins at home.

But in the globalized world, all of us share responsibilities and should face them squarely.

Beyond economic figures, Europe and Latin America have a common cultural and political interest that binds them as much as economic factors.

I do not mean that Latin America should approach Europe only as a counterweight to North American influence. This would be tantamount to forgetting that Europe and Latin America are bearers of pluralistic cultures than broaden and enrich our view of the world –even in the United States did not exist or even when it no longer exists– as Bill Clinton has asked his compatriots to consider, as the world’s only superpower. Shades of Edward Gibbon!

I am simply asserting that Europeans and Latin Americans should be conscious of the fact that we are bearers of rich cultural traditions. And cultural traditions are always modern, contemporary traditions, if we decide to treat the as such.

Culture is two-way avenue. It opens whole networks of communication. It identifies and mutually enriches us. It tells us that we shall only be what we are if we open up to what we are not.

We Latin American are heirs to the best of Europe. We are the best of Europe projected outside of Europe.

“European civilization”, warns the former Prime Minister of Italy, Massimo d’Alema, “has produced a political world founded on national states, institutions, parties, rules, along with a moral world made of culture, arts, intelligence, talent. This mixture has made a unique Europe capable of being reborn in spite of the profound wounds that have marked its soul...”

This, the Europe described by D’Alema, is our Europe. In this Europe, we recognize ourselves.

We do not when Europe denies itself and falls down the shafts of xenophobia, chauvinism, racism, antisemitism, antiIslamism, religious fanaticism and the stigmatization of the migrant worker, especially the worker from Latin America.

For what doe the Latin American worker do in Europe but give back to the Europe that conquered us work, culture, and human strength for an aging demography. We give back the same thing that Europe gave us: the encounter of cultures and races.

Partners in a globalized world, Europe and Latin America both know that globalization does not stop with the movement of capitals and merchandise. It includes the free movement of peoples, under clear and hu-
man legal rules, but with the overriding certainty that migrant labor benefits both the sending and the receiving communities.

I have evoked what I consider important matters.

Yet in today’s world, there is an obligation which overshadows all others, for both our individual and our collective futures depend on it. This obligation is to restore the rule of law in international affairs.

It is often forgotten that Europe and Latin America share a common bond of legal internationalism.

Spain was the only colonial power that gave itself a set of laws to regulate its relations with de aboriginal peoples of the Americas. These were Laws of Indies passed by the Spanish Crown. Often disregarded or betrayed, these generous laws also protected a minimum of rights, so much so that the revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, when he rose in arms in Mexico early in the 20th Century, did so in name of “the laws given to us by Charles V of Spain grating us the right to our land”.

From the University of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria, in the 16th Century, not only promoted the laws protecting Indian rights, but elevated them to rules of international conduct between the newly minted Nation-States of Europe, based on the respect for human rights.

This is parallel to Hugo Grotius, revolutionary proposal, in 1625 and from the Netherlands, of an international contract on the rules of war and peace. War was the norm and peace the exception in the Middle Ages. Grotius proposed that war be the exception and peace the rule. In Germany, Kant’s idea that each State retain its sovereignty but fully commit itself to solve conflicts by peaceful methods and negotiation, has a resonant ring to it in the world we are living in.

Indeed, in the post-cold war world, without the threat of a hostiles nuclear power to unite it against, we all face –some, even, with misplaced nostalgia for the Soviet Union– we all face a faceless enemy, terrorism, an enemy without a flag, a state or boundaries.

No greater mistake, then, then to single out only one state and one ruler –Iraq and Sadam Hussein– as the priority terrorist, thus freeing the faceless terrorists to organize and strike and even convert Iraq, and the whole Middle East, into a breeding ground of terrorists.

The priorities went wrong. Clinton knew them. A) Solve the Israel-Palestine issue. B) Identify and isolate terrorist groups. Germany and Italy know that terrorism is not defeated by further terrorism and illegality, but by draining the swamps that breed terrorism, isolating them, attending to social, economic and cultural grievances that favor them and doing all of this with attachment to the rule of law, both internal and international.

Do not give terrorists arms and arguments that they don’t deserve.

How does all of this project itself on the Europe-Latin America relationship?
First, by reminding us that democracy and the rule of law are not static givens. They demand the exercise of liberty, fully knowing that total freedom is never attainable, because of the simple fact that death exists.

Freedom then becomes the fight for freedom, endless, forever unsatisfied, forever opening up new human horizons.

This tragic conception of life, as ancient as the theatre of Sophocles or Aztec lyric poetry, as contemporary as the novels of Gunter Grass and Juan Rulfo, offer Europeans and Latin Americans a shared vision: we are conscious that progress not always progresses and that human beings should preserve a sacred space of resistance for failure.

Nothing succeeds like success... except, sometimes, failure.

In the second place, and most importantly, understanding that we do not live a conflict of civilizations, but a conflict of obligations.

Global disparities, both inside and outside the developed world, must be faced and overcome. The world will be inherently unstable as long as half the population on this planet lives on two dollars or less a day. As long as a hamburger in Chicago costs only ten minutes of work and a hamburger in Nairobi costs four hours of work.

As long as the basic needs of health and food in the Third World require an investment of $11 billion dollars... and Europeans consume in ice cream exactly $11 billion dollars a year.

As long as the basic needs for education in the Third World require an investment of $9 billion dollars and the annual sale of cosmetics in the United States are of, precisely, $9 billion dollars.

As long as the world spends $800 billions dollars a year in armaments, yet cannot find the $9 billion dollars a year necessary to sit every child in the world in a schoolroom next year.

This list of inequality and injustice is long.

It will be shortened if we do not create a world order based on legality.

Since the end of the Second World War, we had lived under the system of the United Nations promoted by two great American Presidents. Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, both aware that the health of the post-war world and of the United States itself, depended on multilateralism and shared obligations under the rule of law.

Truman said it at the founding of the UN in San Francisco on 1946: “We all have to recognize, no matter how great our strength, that we must deny ourselves the license to do always as we please”.

This philosophy was forcefully echoed by president Bill Clinton in 1999: “We must forsake the illusion that we can forever claim four ourselves what we deny others”.

Let me say outright that the best of Europe and the best of Latin American have now been faithful to the best in the United States.
Latin America feels itself reflected in the New Europe—the new, yes, Germany and France and now Zapatero’s Spain—the New Europe’s opposition to the barbarism of preventive war and the impossibility of unilaterality beyond precarious military successes that rapidly become political and economic failures.

Former Mexican president Ernest Zedillo put it forcefully ant last year’s Harvard University commencement speech: All nations, even the most powerful, need the multilateral system, as opposed to unilateralism which only isolates and confronts. Even more bluntly: There is no globalization without multilateralism. We all depend too much upon one another. Imperial hubris is a self-defeating attitude.

Dominique de Villepin, until recently France’s foreign minister, asked at the height of the Iraq crisis: “Under which rules will we live together?”

Such is the question: What should be the legality that rules a new reality?

It was the question of the first globalization in the 15th and 16th centuries, when de Copernicus discovered the heavens and Columbus and Magellan discovered the world itself.

It was the question of the second globalization of the 18th and 19th centuries: how to give the sometimes brutal and de-humanizing but inevitable process of industrialization a set of rules governing child labor, working conditions, social rights, worker’s unions.

It is the question of this, the third globalization: How to profit from the world-wide realities of information, technological prowess, flow capital and workers, giving them a legal framework that servers the needs of the majority of the world’s peoples, of the poor and the aged, of women, who account for more than half the world’s work, the homeless, the sick...

The European project is not perfect. No political project ever is. Yet politics, said former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, is not the art of the possible. It is the art of making the necessary possible.

And the European project if far closer than any other to the Latin American will to have nations that function both as State and societies, that conjugate the efforts of the public, the private and the third sectors under a humane set of laws.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Let us, Europeans and Latin Americans, attempt to make the necessary possible.

The world requires the ever stronger union of the best of Europe and the best of Latin American.

Let us give the world the best of what we have promised ourselves.