



# **SPEECH BY JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC, ON THE OCCASION OF THE SYMPOSIUM FOR A EUROPE OF CULTURE**

**ELYSEE PALACE - MONDAY 2 MAY 2005**

Ministers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Friends,

It is a pleasure to see you gathered here today. I am delighted that so many performers, artists, intellectuals, cultural officials and policy-makers from the twenty-five countries of the European Union have accepted France's invitation. Thank you for coming.

Your creative work, your thoughts, your discussions are day by day weaving the fabric of a Europe of art and ideas. This Europe, a work in progress, borne by centuries of civilization, has never ceased to drive our continent forward in the long and wondrous adventure of its unification.

Long before it existed economically and politically, Europe was a cultural reality. Our cultures have resonated since time immemorial, gradually building up legacies, emotions and a common consciousness. In times of interaction and times of trial, the peoples of Europe have over the centuries forged a common culture, a common identity and common values. Europe could not have been built politically without this common heritage, which anchors it in our common history.

From Antiquity to the Middle Ages, the artistic and intellectual life of Europe drew its constantly replenished inspiration from the same sources right across the continent. The Roman world followed the Greek and was nourished by the Celtic heritage; and then the West was covered with the "white mantle of churches", in the words of one historian. The Gothic succeeded the Romanesque, drawing on Arab influence in Andalusia and Byzantine influence in Venice. In Europe's monasteries and universities, a common consciousness was gradually emerging.

During the Renaissance, Europe had already become a reality for philosophers, scholars, writers and artists. The humanists saw themselves as citizens of a "Republic of Letters" stretching across the continent and bringing together ancients and moderns, pagans and Christians, in a community of the mind spanning origin and epoch.



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Humanism brought religions and cultures together in Europe in a co-existence based on the strong and inspirational idea that "nothing is more admirable than man".

Classical rigour soon succeeded baroque profusion; man asserted his critical powers against all spiritual and temporal authority. The philosophes of the Enlightenment ranged far and wide across our continent proclaiming the cause of reason.

The revolutionary fire that started in France touched off ideological and national passions from one end of the continent to the other. They served as inspiration for artists all over Europe throughout the nineteenth century, from the great awakening of romanticism to its ultimate metamorphoses in symbolism and Art Nouveau. The ideals of the rights of man and of democracy shone as a beacon for philosophers, writers and utopians as they aspired to unity and brotherhood. Stefan Zweig's *Vienna and World of Yesterday* radiated at the turn of the century across a continent that had always been nourished by Jewish culture - a continent over which were soon to rage the destructive "storms of steel" of the two world wars and the horror of the Holocaust.

Europe rose from the ruins drained of its strength. But tragedy retempered its humanist ideal. A new consciousness germinated. From that time on, Europe aspired to political and economic unity to ward off the spectre of war and savagery. On the strength of this endeavour, we have made our continent a haven of peace, democracy and freedom. The reconciliation of all our peoples after the fall of the Berlin wall was given formal expression in the enlargement of Europe, bringing this lofty goal to fruition.

Despite the deep yearning of its peoples for unity, Europe had until that point been prey to a relentless ideological rivalry that had doomed it to remain divided in its values and endeavours. But Europe is now reconciled with itself and its history. A hitherto forbidden future has opened up and our nations can now at long last forge a common destiny borne by the same ideals. It is this that enables us now to adopt a Constitution in which we are grounding the future of our continent not only in a commonality of economic interests but also in the community of values, principles and ideals that make Europe unique in the world.

Fifty years have elapsed since the construction of Europe began. Clearly, it has come a very long way. But just as clearly, Europe must now reach further milestones, meet new challenges and face up to new questions.

The undertaking that has carried the European idea forward for a half century must now seek out new paths, resolutely assert our values and our common identity, lay claim to the ideals without which Europe would remain unfinished. The European idea must be fleshed out, must speak to the heart as well as the head. Europe must better appeal to its peoples by opening up for them new avenues, new aspirations, new dreams.



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This is what European artists and intellectuals call on us to do. They recognize no national borders. One thinks, in France, of Giorgio Strehler staging the Marriage of Figaro at the Paris Opera under its then director Rolf Lieberman and coming to found the "Theatre of Europe" in Paris, and of Pontus Hulten directing of the Museum of Modern Art at the Pompidou Centre - just two examples among many. One thinks of the brilliant European co-productions in film, from Visconti's "The Leopard" to Wim Wenders' "Wings of Desire". The European project is demonstrably, by its very nature, a cultural undertaking. It is indeed, first and foremost, a commitment by a highly diverse group of peoples and nations to share a common ideal of civilization while remaining true to their individual identities.

Being a European does not mean giving up one's own identity, far from it. Being a European means being ever more French, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish or any other nationality, so as to put down roots in the soil of nations united by the strength of a shared destiny. Since the Middle Ages, culture has embraced continent as a whole. It has irrigated the vast array of national and regional cultures. That which deeply unites us in fact exalts our diversity.

The traces of our common history form a rich heritage for us all. Shared references criss-cross our memories, our minds and our thoughts. Our cultural roots lie in the same soil. Our dreams are lit by the same light.

Culture is the steward of this heritage, shaping it and liberally adding to it the creative legacy of our own time and then passing it on to future generations. Europe's identity is expressed in this creative elan, which is above all else an act of faith in the freedom of man and confidence in the future. Europe does not derive its identity from History. Europe's identity is on the contrary an expression of rebellion, a stand taken against the ravages of History and its centuries of war and wrenching division. In the determination to make a break with the endless round of tragedy lie the grandeur and gallantry of the European idea.

Europe is also rooted in its concept of man and of human dignity. Day after day we strive together to foster an acceptance of the human condition even in its inconsistencies, to combine the emancipation of the individual with the need for roots, the yearning for liberty and the duty of solidarity, the aspiration to the universal and the diversity of peoples.

This ideal is now more than ever an issue. At a time when the false prophets of the "clash of civilizations" are predicting a confrontation that is foreign to everything we stand for; we must not even think of shutting ourselves up in national fortresses. Separation and isolation would be fatal to our cultures, which aspire to dialogue and interaction with others in a spirit of recognition and respect. More than ever we must make certain that Europe remains welcoming to other cultures and that Europe stands, for all creative people, for all artists and for all intellectuals as a beacon, a place of welcome.

In a world that seems to leave less and less room for anything not driven by the profit motive, cultures must also resist the onslaught of standardized



products. We must staunchly defend the world's diversity of cultures against the looming threat of uniformity. The vitality of our own cultural creativity will be of invaluable help to us in doing so.

As we build Europe politically, our common goals must more than ever, take inspiration from culture. Policy-makers share this responsibility with artists and intellectuals. The appeal for "A Europe founded on Culture" issued on 8 June 2004, to which I hope there will be a very broad response, is based on this idea.

All European States recognize the importance of culture in the life of our communities. Culture expresses the highest human aspirations, the human quest for beauty, purity, truth and perfection. It provides the momentum and creativity that drive progress in our societies. It is, for the individual, a way to achieve emancipation and fulfilment. In every nation in Europe, it is not a secondary, subsidiary activity but rather a fundamental value.

We recognize that culture cannot be left to the laws of the marketplace, just as it must not be harnessed by the State. Concentration is as much a threat to cultural diversity as cutthroat competition. It is therefore right and proper that the public authorities - that is, our governments and Europe - should act to safeguard freedom of expression and cultural diversity.

These convictions were forcefully reiterated in the autumn of 2004 in Berlin at the meetings organized at the instigation of Chancellor Schröder to focus on "A Soul for Europe", which our meetings in Paris now extend.

We must cultivate our diversity, make it resonate within us. We must stand in the front ranks in the battle to defend it across the world. The responsibilities for doing this are shared between Europe and its Member States and are clearly spelled out in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

The Treaty is a major step forward. In setting out clear lines of authority in cultural matters for the Union and the Member States, it strengthens cultural policies.

The Constitutional Treaty clearly establishes the legitimate right of each Member State to devise and conduct its own cultural policy. The role of the European Union is clearly recognized: it is to support Member States, to assist in or extend their activities in order, as the Constitution states, to "bring our common cultural heritage to the fore". For the very first time, the cultural construction of Europe will become a fundamental objective of the Union.

In cultural matters, there can be no question of universal harmonization or integration. Harmonization and integration will be the exception rather than the rule, undertaken only with respect to specific cultural activities when required for economic reasons and in order to promote their development. For



example, in the area of intellectual property we have harmonized upwards, enshrining the most stringent approach to copyright in Europe. We must now go further, working together in particular to better combat piracy.

But it is first and foremost up to Member States freely to define their cultural policies. This is the way to make the Europe of Culture strong. The role of the European Union is to guarantee the ability of its members to take their own initiatives. As it defends the cultural exception throughout the world, Europe must recognize cultural specificity in conducting its own policies on such matters as competition and the internal market.

Here, too, the Constitutional Treaty is a springboard to progress. It proclaims cultural diversity as a fundamental objective of the Union. The new motto - "United in Diversity" - expresses this goal. The Constitution for Europe also sets out the principle that the European Union must take account of the cultural aspects of every action it takes and for whatever purpose that may be. This then provides a solid and unassailable legal foundation for the recognition of the specificity of cultural goods. It provides a basis for full recognition of State subsidies for culture by the European Union. This has already provided one of the strengths of the "Television without Borders" Directive, which shores up national systems supporting audiovisual production. This approach must be extended, and the Constitution for Europe will be of great assistance. France will be following this very closely.

The Treaty will also facilitate full recognition of cultural industries. They play a major role in supporting whole sectors of the arts and in making culture available to the broadest possible audience. The special status of these industries must be made official. They must be encouraged and supported so that they can do their best to be European champions in the world competition. This was one of France's main goals in proposing a common review of the taxes applying to cultural goods.

The Constitutional Treaty firmly lays the cornerstone of the Europe of Culture in setting out the respective competences of Member States and the European Union. Building on that, the Union must now define cultural goals for itself. This will undoubtedly strengthen support by citizens for the European endeavour. The Union's role will be to encourage a dialogue among the cultures of Europe. This is what it must primarily marshal its forces to do.

It is in fact doing this already, to some extent. But it is hampered by the requirement for unanimity among Member States. With the Constitutional Treaty, a qualified majority will suffice, except of course in international trade negotiations where unanimity safeguards cultural diversity. This will mean that a single country will no longer be able to prevent initiatives from being taken. This is a great step forward. It will stimulate the commitment to Europe and affirm the goal that Europe has set itself in respect of its own culture.

We will thus be able to do more to facilitate the circulation of European works. They are not yet moving across the interior borders of the Union as they



should be. In each Member State, the cultures of the other Member States are not sufficiently available.

When it comes to cinema and audiovisual works, the reason for this is economic: it is difficult to export European productions because they need to turn a profit on narrower national markets than those of our major competitors. There are therefore legitimate grounds for action by the public authorities to offset this state of affairs. The MØdia program, which aims to improve the circulation of European films in Europe and throughout the world, was set up to do this. It should be extended and broadened.

The European Union is already fostering ties between artists and cultural institutions across the continent, creating a vast European cultural area. One example that comes to mind is the THEOREM network bringing together festivals and theatres to produce and disseminate performances from the new member countries across all of Europe; another is the Varese network which works to disseminate contemporary music. We must build on and amplify all such initiatives.

The workshops that prepared your meetings have come up with some highly interesting proposals. I was particularly struck by the suggestion, among others, that a European heritage label should be created to fill the gap between the UNESCO World Heritage list and national protection measures. A label of this kind could designate the most important monuments and places of remembrance that make up our common heritage and thus foster awareness of our cultural identity.

Similarly, the proposal of a European guarantee fund to facilitate the movement of exhibitions around the Union deserves close attention.

The European vocation of the Arte television network, a striking example of cooperation between France and Germany, could also be amplified.

In the same spirit, I proposed an initiative to create a virtual European library. This is crucial if Europe is to occupy its rightful place on tomorrow's map of knowledge. In future, anything that is not available in digital form and on line runs the risk of being ignored and possibly even forgotten. Our continent has assets to build on - in addition to the wealth of our institutional heritage, especially our libraries, we have the expertise of our businesses in the field of digitization and indexing of digital holdings.

We must leverage these assets by pooling our efforts and networking them to make them more effective. We must come together to make the necessary commitment to research and development so as to consolidate our command of these technologies, as what is at stake is considerable. The development program aimed at creating a new French-German search engine, which Chancellor Schröder and I launched last week, will obviously be closely tied in with this project.



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Already a number of States have taken the initiative to create the virtual European library called for by those responsible for the main national libraries in Europe. Last week France joined Germany, Spain, Hungary, Italy and Poland in calling on the European Union to take on this project. All Member States wishing to join us will obviously be most welcome.

It is by taking such initiatives that Europe will be in the vanguard of the struggle for cultural diversity, fulfilling its own profound vocation and working towards a fundamental goal in the world in which we live.

What is this goal exactly? It is the recognition that culture is not merchandise and that it cannot be left to the blind forces of the market. This conviction guides us in the construction of Europe. It also applies to globalization.

Over the last decade, France and Europe together have fought unremittingly for the cultural exception, borne by their firm belief that the WTO and the trade discussions that take place there are not the right forum for dealing with issues related to cultural exchange. Those working in culture, particularly filmmakers, have rallied to our cause and France, with others, has ceaselessly fought to defend this principle. It is a rough battle, waged without letup because so much is at stake economically. But what is also at stake is our vision of what it means to be human. The cultural exception is based on a political and moral affirmation of the utmost importance: that there are human activities that cannot be reduced to their status as merchandise.

The Constitution for Europe will once and for all enshrine the principle of the cultural exception that is so important to us. By derogation to the common rule, the Constitutional Treaty requires unanimity of Member States to negotiate and implement trade agreements covering cultural and audiovisual services. In defending the cultural exception the Union, like France, will never give way. They will continue to uphold the most stringent concept of it.

The same goals should apply to the work being done at UNESCO to draw up an international convention on cultural diversity. I put forward this idea at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. The idea is gaining ground, helped in particular by the support of all the Member States of the European Union and the International Francophonie Organization. At the behest of France, supported by a number of our partners, the Commission has become heavily involved in the process. This demonstrates the consensus view on this key issue that we have arrived at within the Union. Much remains to be done. If Europe stands united, our views will prevail.

The convention should establish the specificity of cultural goods. It will strengthen the legitimacy of policies aimed at fostering cultural diversity. It will provide a reference framework for States and international organizations. These will be crucial steps forward. France will do its utmost to ensure that the convention is signed next autumn. And we are counting on the support of everyone to achieve this.



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Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are called upon to face up to the challenge of a complex, often confusing world moving forward in fits and starts; a world in which technology is opening up new frontiers; a world in which the threat of uniformity is awakening identities; in which civilizations must stand up for dialogue if they are to avoid standing against each other; a world which must find, in its own diversity, the wellsprings of its unity. This world is now organizing into major poles. Europe has a vocation to be one of the most significant of the world's great poles .

To this end, Europe must obviously consolidate its status as a great economic power. It must assert itself as a political power. And if it is to take its rightful place, it must ensure that it remains one of the "empires of the mind" which Winston Churchill said would be the empires of the future.

This is what is at stake in the Europe of Culture. This is the theme of these meetings, which are designed to enable you to add your voices to the long line of poets, painters, writers, musicians, sculptors, filmmakers and thinkers who weave the web of our common identity.

You are here to lend life to the debate, dialogue and plurality of opinion and thought; you are here to embody and to render visible, perceptible and audible the living reality of the Europe of Culture. Your presence here in Paris symbolizes the purpose, the hope and the conviction of our common and shared European destiny.

Thank you.

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