

Translation of the speech held by Eberhard Diepgen, the governing Mayor of Berlin, at the reception of the "Societe Imaginaire" on June 11, 1992 at 6 P.M. in the Zeughaus, Marmorsaal

President Sanguinetti
Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

The spirit drifts not only where it likes, it comes to rest where it may. It is a compliment to our city that today it has gathered here in such concentration.

It has already been a year since the "Societe Imaginaire" last met in Berlin to discuss the changes taking place in Europe. Then the hopes for the future were nearly as great as the joy about the collapse of communism and the end of the cold war.

Now the day-to-day problems and complications have become clearer, but the advantages of this transformation have also become more apparent. Berlin once again sees itself as an open city—equally open to the West and the East, the North and the South.

Our foremost thanks are owed to the East Germans, who brought about the end to the division of our city, although it is doubtful that the fall of the SED regime would have been possible if the citizens of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia had not already banded together and overthrown their old dictatorships.

Berlin owes the end of its division, Germany its unification, to these major Central European movements toward freedom and democracy. As long as the funds and assistance are necessitated, we will continue to support the development of these democratically reformed states.

At the same time we must also avoid the development of a new "Eurocentrism". Two events currently making headlines—the "Year of Columbus" and the summit in Rio—remind us that the wealthy nations have a responsibility toward all nations pursuing a democratic path.

This task cannot be accomplished by political means alone. Industry and culture are equally challenged. An exceptional element of the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe is that many writers have found their way into politics.

The members of the "Societe Imaginaire" reflect the close relation between politics and culture. This relationship can be observed in the democratically reformed governments of Central Europe, as it has been admired in a number of Latin American countries for a number of years.

Here as there intellectuals do more than provide a stimulus, they also are unafraid of assuming political responsibility with all the obligations to pragmatism it entails.

Writers, academics, and artists can make essential contributions to the idea of a unified Europe. In today's discussions about the development of Europe there is a lack of mutual understanding.

The bridges we build today must not be made of stone or steel. There are also bridges made of words and ideas, of shared concepts and discussions.

For this reason the search for a foundation on which to base the politics of tomorrow, which the members of the "Societe Imaginaire" are engaged in, is very welcome in Berlin. The visible sometimes is less important than the invisible—especially when, as is the case with this gathering, it is a transatlantic, cooperative effort forging plans for our common future.

The Polish historian Krzysztof Pomian has called the system of relations between the great thinkers and scholars of the Enlightenment a "Gelehrtenrepublik" (republic of scholars) that overcame political borders and language barriers. The "Gelehrtenrepublik" was the home of the progressive and literally European spirit.

The "Societe Imaginaire" has adapted the continual and personal dialog as a method in a period in which talk of the necessity for a new world order is not unfounded. It creates a special network of relations, fostering the exchange and cooperation between intellectuals of all continents.

Though new satellites for more television stations and information networks may constantly be installed, these cannot replace the direct encounter between people having shared ideas about the future.

At this point I would like to thank you all for agreeing to put your experiences at the disposal of the open city of Berlin.

In the most fruitful phases of its history, Berlin was always two things at once: a catalyst for new ideas and projects and a space open to the experiments of great minds. Many who have left their traces behind in Berlin were, or were only permitted to be, true "Berliners" for a short while.

Berlin's self-awareness always amounted to more than its role as a national capital. Even in the period of division an outlook beyond city limits and state borders was guaranteed by the universities, the "Wissenschaftskolleg" (Institute for the Humanities), the film festival, the Horizons Festival, and last but not least the "House of World Cultures".

Today the "Athens-on-Spree" of yore is a workshop of unity. In this Berlin has a role to play for which there are no models from antiquity. Thus we are all the more thankful for suggestions coming from competent individuals.

I wish the members of the "Societe Imaginaire" an intensive encounter and a fruitful dialog in and with our city.