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## MORAL LEADERSHIP IN THE XXI CENTURY. THE CASE OF ANGELA MERKEL AND THE EUROPEAN REFUGEE CRISIS

MORALNE PRZYWÓDZTWO W XXI WIEKU.  
PRZYKŁAD ANGELI MERKEL I KRYZYSU MIGRACYJNEGO W EUROPIE

### Summary

With the aim to bolster support for a pan-European consensus on managing the refugee crisis culminated in 2015 with more than 1 million people reaching European soil, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel gave in October of the same year an essential speech to the European Parliament. In the article author claims that Merkel's behaviour equals that of a global moral leader. To manifest this thesis, Merkel's speech is analysed based on the four key characteristics of global moral leaders by Kirk O. Hanson.

### Keywords

leadership, morality, European Union, refugee crisis

### Streszczenie

W 2015 roku do Europy przybyło ponad 1 milion uchodźców. W październiku tego samego roku Kanclerz Republiki Federalnej Niemiec, Angela Merkel, wygłosiła ważne przemówienie w Parlamencie Europejskim. W artykule autorka stawia tezę, że postawa Kanclerz Niemiec wobec kryzysu migracyjnego w Europie nosi cechy globalnego moralnego przywództwa. Autorka, aby udowodnić swoją tezę, posługuje się stworzonymi przez Kirka O. Hansona czterema kluczowymi charakterystykami moralnego przywództwa.

### Słowa kluczowe

przywództwo, moralność, Unia Europejska, kryzys uchodźczy

## INTRODUCTION

Although the 21<sup>st</sup> century is probably no less challenging in terms of global turmoil and crises than the previous one, they do not equal each other, and challenges take their own shapes and forms. Societies were and still are faced with natural disas-

ters (e.g. floods, earthquakes, tsunamis), internal as well as international conflicts and wars, with poverty and malnutrition, with threats of terrorism (e.g. ISIS, Boko Haram), as well as with economic downturns as demonstrated by the global financial crisis. The year 2015, however, particularly marked a watershed for Europe. It was a year during which terror hit European capitals, the Ukrainian conflict reached its peak in heavy fighting's, and a refugee crisis with millions of people fleeing war, violence, and poverty in historic dimensions broke out.

Under this hardship, people mostly build their hopes on political leaders to free them from the emergency. Here, politicians and statesmen sometimes find themselves under enormous pressure as they must quickly make their decisions according to the interests of the community. They must weigh between what is right and wrong, while at the same time being concerned about the consequences of their decisions and respect of human and moral values.

In 2015, the refugee crisis culminated with more than 1 million people from the global south reaching European soil by the Mediterranean Sea and by land [UNHCR, 2015]. The high numbers of displaced people for European leaders and its citizens did not only constitute and still constitute a political, cultural and logistical challenge but also a moral one. Remember the image of a three-year-old Syrian boy washed up on a Turkish beach that went global and finally raised Europe's leader's awareness of the need for moral leadership and a change in the public and political mood.

As reaction to this humanitarian crisis, though at the expense of European unity and the formation of opposing forces particularly in the new member states, Germany's Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel gave an essential speech to the European Parliament in October the same year in which she explained her "open door" policy. Months later she was named *person of the year* by the *Time Magazine* "for standing firm in support of aid to refugees" [Vick, 2015] and praised by the UN General Secretary Ban Ki-Moon "for human political leadership on the refugee crisis" [Dunn, 2016].

This essay claims that Angela Merkel's behavior clearly represents that of a moral leader. To underline this thesis, a theoretical framework will be constructed upon which a definition of moral leadership will be given. This framework will be applied to Angela Merkel's speech given to the European Parliament which serves as a perfect case for this essay. A range of press articles will also be included into the analysis.

## **1. Defining Moral Leadership – A Theoretical Approach**

By examining relevant literature in search of an absolute definition of leadership, and moral leadership, one must note that scholars rather tend to describe what they under-

stand by the term Leadership than agreeing on a common definition. Ciulla's referring to Rost's collection of 221 definitions from 1920s to the 1990s [Rost, 1991, pp. 47–102] concludes that "leadership is about one person getting other people to do something" [Ciulla, 2003]. Accordingly, leadership is necessarily composed of two bodies: a leader and a group of followers undertaking action because of the leader's appeal. However, for an effective leadership – meaning to achieve the followers doing what the leader has determined – according to Rhode, leadership also requires a certain relationship since the title cannot inspire people to follow their leaders [Rhode, 2006]. To inspire, drive and convince people, Gini concludes that "the vision and values of leadership must have their origins and resolutions in the community of followers." [Gini, 2004, p. 40] Hence it is extremely necessary that the leader's behavior respects and reflects the will of the followers to have decisions be accepted or implemented by the community of followers.

When it comes to the characterization of moral leadership, it is inevitable to look for a definition of morality. Reeck defines morality as based on "socially approved patterns and norms of proper conduct." [Reeck, 1982, p. 22] By this definition it can be assumed that society was and is still crucial for the development of moral standards and for judging what is morally right or wrong, good or bad. At this point, the significant role of a leader becomes visible: As the leader's actions have a greater impact on a greater number of people and as followers look at him as a role model, he necessarily should act in accordance with fundamental moral principles to maintain or reestablish a sense for moral appropriate behavior in society. At this point, however, the question arises which consequences a leader must face if his values differ from the follower's values and expectations? If he acted according to his moral values but not in the interest of his followers? Does he not eventually risk being replaced?

For the moral assessment of leadership, most scholars consider e.g. the intentions of leaders, the means leaders use to lead and the ends of leadership [Ciulla, 2005, p. 332]. Another, more pertinent approach in this regard offers Hanson's essay *Perspectives on Global Moral Leadership*.

According to him:

"Moral leadership is about leading an organization or people to accomplish an explicitly moral purpose. Moral leadership usually involves transformation, for example, by introducing a people to new moral value or calling out behavior from the group consistent with a moral value that is not currently practiced".

[Hanson, 2006, p. 291]

Apparently, these characterizations and the term global moral leadership fit perfectly to the situation of the 2015 refugee crisis calling for solidarity in overcoming the global humanitarian crisis that is accompanied by ignorance and indifference by several governments. Furthermore, Hanson provides four key characteristics of global moral leaders which shall guide the following analysis: A global moral leader demonstrates a personal commitment to a set of values; he stresses the world's need for key moral values that are not currently held or acted; he encourages to articulate and promote the values even at risk to his own power, and he finds ways to communicate and promote the values effectively [Hanson, 2006].

The following examines which of these characteristics can be recovered in Angela Merkel's speech given to the European Parliament as well as in her behavior during the refugee crisis.

## **2. European Values and the Global Need to Enact Those**

In fact, Angela Merkel in her speech refers not only to one single value but considers an entire set of European fundamental values, which she aims to rhetorically merge in her speech. Here, in addition to the normative values that are written down in the constitutional acts of the European Union, such as in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and in the Lisbon treaty (paragraph 6 of the speech), also concepts of fairness and solidarity (par. 21) play an important role in her argumentation. What is even more interesting in a symbolic way is that Merkel has consciously decided speaking to the democratic elected representatives of the peoples of Europe.

Following her open-door policy, that is underlined by Merkel's famous phrase "Wir schaffen das" (we will cope), she held her speech in a renewed effort to bolster support for a pan-European consensus on the refugee crisis by emphasizing core European values. At the beginning of her speech Merkel makes references to how Europe has overcome challenges in the past by acting in unity and not according to the national interest of one's own country. She stresses how the "historic achievement" of a Europe that is "free and united [...] required tremendous exertions" (par. 2). Merkel refers to core European values of freedom and diversity and alludes to the initial fears and skepticism that had accompanied the process of granting EU membership status to former countries of the Warsaw Pact. Not long ago the citizens of many of those same countries that today are shutting their doors were the ones escaping persecution and seeking refuge. Instead of weakening Europe, these efforts have rather reinforced the European idea and its values, Merkel notes: "They have not brought us less freedom, but more freedom. They have not brought us less diversity, but more diversity" (par 4). Europe was built on prin-

ciples and values such as freedom of movement and it is meant to be united in diversity, enriched by different cultures, traditions and languages. She then goes on by saying that one of the most “precious assets” of European values, tolerance – the combination of freedom and responsibility – towards the Eastern countries and its citizens has trumped skepticism (par. 4). This act of solidarity between European states and the decision to ensure the citizens of post-communist states a life in dignity represent main European notions and reflect a united Europe also in times of crisis.

Now, with the refugee crisis reaching a peak, Europe again is facing a tremendous challenge to its own values (par. 14) and the need to act in the name of a free and united Europe is the logical consequence (par. 2): “We are facing a test of historic proportions” (par. 7), Merkel notes and tries to create a “we-feeling” by calling for a united Europe that is acting upon its values in addressing the migrant crisis and assures these people a life in dignity (par. 9) [Smalle, Surk, 2015]. “In the refugee crisis we must not give in to the temptation to fall back on national government action. On the contrary, what we need now is more Europe” (par. 18). However, she goes even further by saying that managing the crisis and fighting the causes that let people flee is not only a European but “ultimately a global task” (par. 9).

The need to act stems from the given occasion of over 250.000 victims the war in Syria has already claimed, including another 10 million refugees from Syria, Iraq, and the African continent. To get to Europe, they are forced to cross the unstable state of Libya, the Mediterranean Sea, or the Aegean from Turkey (par. 8). A disunited Europe does not only lose control over its own borders but puts refugees in death traps by allowing human traffickers to put these individuals on fragile boats (par. 20). Merkel indirectly admits that Europe has failed in the Middle East both in its political and diplomatic efforts (par. 9). This point of view corresponds with that of many diplomats, including Wolfgang Ischinger who wrote an article on how “Europe [in particular] has failed in Syria” [Ischinger, 2016].

She reminds all Member of the European Parliament that Europe shall not see refugees as an anonymous mass but to respect and treat them as human beings to uphold a minimum of humanitarian standard (par. 23). Although Merkel has been criticized from many sides for her unilateral approach, there were also voices claiming that Merkel is right – both morally and legally – on refugees [Nardelli, 2015]. In fact, she clearly demonstrates her personal commitment to core European values upon which the European Union has been founded and that are written down in the preamble of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union:

“Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law.”

Angela Merkel in her speech reminds all European countries of those values and principles they have devoted themselves by joining European Union. Now, she stresses, Europe needs to deal with the refugee crisis according to these values and in unity:

“For Europe is a community of shared values, a community founded on shared rules and shared responsibility. In my opinion this means that we must be guided by the values we have enshrined in the European treaties: human dignity, the rule of law, tolerance, respect for minorities and solidarity. In my opinion it means that pan-European challenges are not to be solved by a few member states on their own, but by all of us together.” (par. 24)

All these people that have fled their countries and left behind their homes have suffered from war and displacement, terrorism and political persecution, as well as poverty and despair. Europe, Merkel argues, needs to take collective actions to solve this crisis (par. 10).

### **3. The Courage to Defend and the Skills to Promote Those Values**

A global moral leader is also someone, who sticks to its own values even though the odds are clearly against the person. With her open-door policy Merkel demonstratively showed the courage to articulate and promote the values she stands up for even at the risk of losing political support both domestically and at the international level. Before the refugee crisis, she was rather known as a cautious politician who acted on a combination of ideological flexibility to hold the support of her voters and that of international partners. Now she began to advocate a policy that would leave her in isolation [Dempsey, 2016]. In fact, her decision to welcome 1.1 million people amid immense support from volunteers and civil society movements has proved to be the biggest challenge to her leadership since she became German chancellor in 2005.

On the European level, she has not made friends with the eastern European countries, including Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia that strongly oppose her policies, and have argued that the EU needs to be tougher in protecting its borders [Eder, De la Baume, 2015]. In her speech, Merkel indirectly slammed eastern Europeans on migration and criticized these governments for not having learned from their own history

in their responses to the crisis: “Europe [...] is a region that people dream of, in the way that, 25 years ago, I and millions of others in Central and Eastern Europe dreamed of a free and united Germany and Europe” (par. 26). The Visegrad members have refused to sign up to Angela Merkel’s plans for the EU to share the refugee burden by accepting migrant quotas which has created strong division lines and disunity in Europe.

Furthermore, Merkel has demonstrated her courage to articulate and stand up for values by championing them even under growing domestic opposition. The open-door policy cost her support from her own party (CDU), while its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), has repeatedly asked Merkel to impose an upper limit on the number of refugees entering Germany. From her own ranks, some 40 conservative parliamentarians wrote to Merkel demanding a change of policy. With the New Year’s Eve attacks 2015/2016 in the German city of Cologne, in which immigrants were accused of theft and sexual assaults against local women, will has continued to erode support for the government’s asylum policies and let her approval rating fell to the lowest in more than four years (Donahue, 2016). Populist movements such as PEGIDA and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) since then have gained ground in Germany. However, despite the heavy wind blowing from almost all sides she had been ready to stand firm to her values she emphasized in her speech in the European Parliament.

Merkel, however, has been criticized on several occasions for her decision to form a deal with Turkey on the refugee crisis. In her speech she emphasized the key role Turkey is playing in managing the refugee crisis and fighting illegal migration (par. 17). It is debatable whether Merkel’s decision to form a deal with a Turkey, that domestically has increasingly become undemocratic and undermines Europe’s human-rights commitments, is still morally justifiable. On the other hand, Merkel’s intention was to “help those who genuinely need our protection from war and persecution” (par. 16) by enabling war-torn people to come to Europe without taking wobbly boats. Furthermore, she aimed to take pressure from the European countries that are at the Mediterranean Sea.

Rhetorically, Merkel tries to convince her audience in taking responsibility by saying that, thanks to global entanglements and the proximity of crisis to the continent, Europe “can no longer shut off from what is happening in the world” and must accordingly act (par. 15). Merkel highlights the need for a united political process that involves all regional and international actors to address the crises surrounding Europe. And national states must also play their part (par. 16). She refers to the fault-lines between eastern and western European countries 25 years ago and how these challenges have been managed through common efforts. Furthermore, she aims to promote the idea of equality when referring to the fair distribution of refugees among all member states (par. 20). To con-

vince her audience by stressing that the economic and social opportunities will outweigh the risks (par. 27). In a quite emotional move she warns that if Europe simply closes its borders it will abandon its values and thereby losing its identity (par. 25).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the essay was to demonstrate Angela Merkel's decision to unilaterally take leadership of Europe's refugee crisis as a case in point of global moral leadership. Based on existing literature, I constructed a theoretical approach that identified four characteristics of a global moral leader. These four characteristics have then been applied to Angela Merkel's speech in the European Parliament. As it was demonstrated, she clearly presented a personal commitment to a set of values that transcend a single nation or culture. Merkel defended her own decision to open borders due to a need to enact those values according to the many crises and wars on the borders of Europe. She defended her decision even in the wake of growing domestic and international criticism, weakening her own position in favor of her values. If she misses one of the four characteristics, then it is probably the ability to promote these values effectively to its audience since Europe is still struggling in finding a solution to the crisis.

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## **APPENDIX No. 1**

### STATEMENT BY FEDERAL CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Date Oct 07, 2015

#### **in Strasbourg**

President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz,  
President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker,  
Distinguished colleagues at the European Parliament,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

The last time a French President and a German Chancellor jointly addressed the European Parliament was in November 1989. François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl spoke together here in Strasbourg shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Both of them felt that great changes were about to sweep Germany and Europe. Both of them were deeply moved by this wind of change. Both of them clearly expressed their commitment to responding with joint European solutions. And so the healing of the divide in Germany was ultimately followed by the healing of divisions in Europe.

Today we can look back with gratitude and some pride on the historic achievements that we Europeans were responsible for over these years of continental bonding. And now it seems a matter of course to us that Europe is free and united. But this historic achievement required tremendous exertions.

The old member states were, for example, visited by fears and scepticism regarding the plans to almost double the number of European Union member states. Many people viewed freedom of movement for millions of new EU citizens as a threat to their own jobs. New decision-making structures had to be created. European funds had to be redirected towards the new member states.

Today we can see that these efforts have paid off for us all. They have not brought us less prosperity, but more prosperity. They have not brought us less freedom, but more freedom. They have not brought us less diversity, but more diversity. In brief, they have brought us more Europe, because we Europeans have learned in the course of our history to make the most of our diversity. The quality that has enabled us to do this, that has allowed us to combine freedom with responsibility, is tolerance. This is a precious asset.

Overcoming the fault-lines between East and West has proven to be a massive success story. It has shown us what we Europeans can do if we only want to, if we are bold and stick together. It has also shown that there is no reason at all to be discouraged by the set-backs that are bound to come every now and again. In a nutshell, it has shown us what is possible.

This has also been shown by the drafting of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Lisbon Treaty. This has been shown by the lessons of the international financial crisis, which we mastered together and from which we emerged stronger than we had entered it. This has been shown by the European debt crisis, during which we acted together. François Hollande mentioned the difficult negotiations. But by acting together we were able to preserve the cohesion of the eurozone.

Ladies and gentlemen, today the French President François Hollande and myself have been given the privilege of addressing you. I would like to thank the President of the European Parliament for this kind invitation. Now, again, Europe is facing a tremendous challenge. We are facing a test of historic proportions.

I am talking of course about the many, many people who have set off on dangerous journeys to Europe to seek refuge here. People who are crossing the Mediterranean to reach Italy, or who are crossing the Aegean from Turkey to Greece. People who are fleeing civil wars, especially the war in Syria, which has already claimed more than 250,000 lives and made refugees of more than 10 million individuals. Refugees from Iraq and refugees from Africa who cross the unstable state of Libya to reach us.

They all know too well that our diplomatic and political efforts and those of our transatlantic allies have not yet brought peace in Syria. It proved impossible to prevent the terrorist organisation IS from gaining strength in Iraq and in Syria. The power vacuum in Libya has not yet been filled. Giving these people the chance to live their lives in dignity, in their home countries, without being scared to death by bombs and terrorists – managing that is a European task, and ultimately a global task.

Today's message is that it will take a determined contribution from Europe to solve this crisis – by taking action against war and displacement, terrorism and political persecution, and against poverty and despair.

Germany and France have endeavoured resolutely to resolve the terrible conflict between Russia and Ukraine. We have seen the Crimea annexed, and eastern Ukraine destabilised. To be quite frank, it is fortunate that we in Europe acted together, that we imposed sanctions together and said that Russia's actions constituted an impermissible violation of our principles. We are now working in the "Normandy" format to resolve this conflict. Just last Friday we held talks in France, in Paris, which give us cause to hope

that at least the ceasefire could hold. The elections in Donetsk and Luhansk have indeed been postponed. But, ladies and gentlemen, this is only one of many conflicts.

I'm convinced that we have to tailor our foreign and development policy far more closely to the goals of resolving conflicts and combating the factors that cause people to flee their homes. We will also have to provide much more money than we have done to date. The necessary decisions to this end will have to be taken quickly. All of these things will change Europe again, just as Europe was profoundly altered by the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe 25 years ago.

Of course we will continue to work on improving our competitiveness. Of course we will work on the digitisation of our societies, on sustainable development, on a joint energy policy and on free trade agreements with other countries in line with our principles. Now more than ever, there is a need for an economically strong Europe, which uses the opportunities of the single market. To this end we have to improve economic policy coordination within the eurozone and, on that basis, correct the mistakes that were made when the European economic and monetary union was created. Germany and France will play their part in this endeavour.

But the truly massive number of refugees is changing Europe's agenda in yet another way – and permanently, because they challenge our values and interests as Europeans and worldwide in a unique way. If the aim is to regulate and ultimately curb the flood of refugees, there is no alternative to addressing the issues which cause people to flee their homes. This will obviously require time, patience and a long-term strategy.

In these past few months in particular, we in Europe have seen how closely connected we are to these global events, directly, whether we like it or not. We can no longer shut ourselves off from what is happening in the world. Not since the Second World War have so many people fled their homes as today – the number has now reached around 60 million. This figure alone highlights the dimension of the task.

Nobody leaves their home lightly – not even those who are coming to Europe for economic reasons. But we have to say to these people that they cannot stay, to make sure that we can truly help those who genuinely need our protection from war and persecution. We need a political process involving all regional and international actors to resolve the crisis in Syria – with a greater role for Europe. We have to help Syria's neighbours so that they can offer the millions of refugees decent prospects. The European Commission has thus put forward proposals on an improved financial framework. I would also like to thank the European Parliament for supporting these proposals. The national states must also play their part.

Turkey has a key role to play. It is our direct neighbour and a gateway for irregular migration. Turkey is doing amazing things for more than two million refugees from

Syria. But it needs more support from us – to feed and accommodate the refugees, to secure borders, and to fight human traffickers. For this very reason, the dialogue on migration policy that the European Commission has launched with Turkey is of vital importance. Germany will work bilaterally in support of the Commission's endeavours in this regard. Equally important are the efforts to form a government of national unity in Libya. Europe supports the efforts undertaken by UN Envoy León.

The entire European Union is called upon to address these challenges. In the refugee crisis we must not give in to the temptation to fall back on national government action. On the contrary, what we need now is more Europe. More than ever we need the courage and cohesion that Europe has always shown when it was really important. Germany and France are ready to act accordingly.

We are in full agreement on this with the President of the European Commission, who has put many important proposals on the table, proposals that we now need to implement systematically. We are in full agreement on this with the President of the European Council, who is working tirelessly to improve cooperation with the countries of origin and transit. And we are in full agreement on this with the European Parliament, which in its resolution of 10 September reminded us that national go-it-alone efforts will not solve the refugee crisis. Mr President, we would also like to thank you for adopting unconventional, fast-track decisions. These were important.

For only together will Europe succeed in mitigating the root causes of flight and displacement worldwide. Only together will we succeed in effectively combating criminal human trafficking rings. Only together will we succeed in better protecting the external borders of the European Union with jointly operated hotspots and manage not to jeopardise our internally border-less Europe. I will say it explicitly: we will only be able to successfully protect our external borders if we do something in our neighbourhood to overcome the many crises that are happening on our doorstep, as it were. Only together will we succeed in concluding EU-wide returns agreements, in order to get those people who will not be allowed to stay here back to their countries of origin. Only together will we succeed in distributing the refugees fairly and equitably among all the member states. A first step has been taken. For this too I would like to thank the Parliament, or rather a majority thereof.

Let's be honest, the Dublin procedure in its current form is obsolete in practice. The intention behind it was good, of that there can be no doubt. But, all in all, it has not proven viable when faced with the current challenges at our external borders. I therefore advocate the adoption of a new approach based on fairness and solidarity in sharing the burdens. I welcome the Commission's work in this regard. I think it is good that Germany and France are in agreement on this point.

Equally, it is only together that we will succeed in tackling the huge job of integrating so many refugees. We can rightly expect the people who come to us in Europe to become integrated into our societies. This requires them to uphold the rules that apply here, and to learn the language of their new homeland.

But, conversely, we also have a duty to treat the people who come to us in need with respect, to see them as human beings and not as an anonymous mass – regardless of whether they will be allowed to stay or not. That is why it is so important to uphold the minimum humanitarian standards we agreed on for feeding and housing refugees and for conducting asylum proceedings. We owe that to them, the refugees, and to ourselves.

For Europe is a community of shared values, a community founded on shared rules and shared responsibility. In my opinion this means that we must be guided by the values we have enshrined in the European treaties: human dignity, the rule of law, tolerance, respect for minorities and solidarity. In my opinion it means that pan-European challenges are not to be solved by a few member states on their own, but by all of us together.

We need to realise that it wouldn't help anybody for us to try to completely isolate ourselves, to knowingly allow for the fact that people could come to harm at our borders – certainly not the people concerned, who would still find ways and means of getting here, and not even ourselves in Europe. Retreating from the world and shutting ourselves off is an illusion in the age of the Internet. It would not solve any problems, but would create additional ones, for we would be abandoning our values and thereby losing our identity. If we forget that, we betray ourselves – it's that simple. But if we remember it, we will manage to pass this historic test and will, moreover, emerge stronger from this crisis than we went into it. Then we will manage to persuasively stand up for our values and interests at global level, too. By the way, that is what people outside of Europe, too, expect of us.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reasons why people leave their homelands are all too familiar to us from our own European history. For centuries, our continent was not the destination, but first and foremost the starting point for refugees, displaced persons and migrants. – Jean-Claude Juncker reminded us forcefully of this fact in his state of the Union address. – Today Europe is a region on which many people from all over the world pin their hopes and aspirations – a region that people dream of, in the way that, 25 years ago, I and millions of others in Central and Eastern Europe dreamed of a free and united Germany and Europe.

We have to deal responsibly with Europe's gravitational pull. In other words, we have to take greater care of those who are in need today in our neighbourhood. If we view this challenge as a joint European and worldwide challenge, we will also be able

to identify and seize the economic and social opportunities that this historic test brings. And we will, incidentally, see that the opportunities are greater than the risks.

We will have to continue working hard to convince people of the value of our Europe. François Hollande, after centuries of war and hatred between our two peoples we are today fighting together for shared objectives. I would like to invite all of you here in this distinguished House to work together to convince people of the value of our Europe. Every single MEP can play an important role – in your home states, in your constituencies, and across Europe vis-à-vis the pan-European public.

Let us work together on this, in the manner that Helmut Kohl suggested back in 1989 here in the European Parliament with an eye on the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. I quote: “with judiciousness and moderation, with creativity and flexibility”.

Thank you very much.

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