

**Laudatio des Bundespräsidenten der Bundesrepublik
Deutschland, Dr. Johannes Rau (English) Citation by Federal
President Johannes Rau on the occasion of the awarding of
the International Charlemagne Prize to Valéry Giscard
d'Estaing Aachen, 29 May 2003**

I.

The history of the Charlemagne Prize reflects the process of European integration. We are thinking of Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, the initiators of European integration. We are thinking of Konrad Adenauer, who firmly anchored Germany in European cooperation, of Paul Henri Spaak with his idea of a European defence. We are thinking of Emilio Colombo and of course Jacques Delors who provided European cooperation with particular momentum in difficult times. This year we are paying tribute to a great French patriot, a visionary European, a champion of the Franco-German friendship: Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. This really is a good choice. I congratulate both the Board of the Charlemagne Prize and the recipient. It really is a good choice but it is not without risk. The prize is after all being awarded for something that is not yet completed. It remains to be seen whether the Convention will manage what is expected of it in the prize declaration. Here we read, "over fifty years after the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community, it is time to give the Community a constitution and thereby the internal form enabling it to exercise a leading role in the world as a Political Union". It is true that European cooperation faces a major test today. It is probably only comparable with the phase after the war when the Community was established and the period of political and economic upheaval in Europe since the mid-1980s. Our cooperation faces three major challenges: The European Union has to mould the enlargement on which the seal was set just a few weeks ago in Athens and it has to keep the door open for further accession candidates in the years to come. It has to push ahead with internal reform and at the same time agree on a European constitution in the Convention and the subsequent intergovernmental conference. Finally, the European Union has to show that Europe wants to shoulder its responsibility in the world and what the European responses to the global questions and problems look like. We can feel just how urgently the citizens of Europe need this.

II.

There is no risk in the decision of the Board of the Charlemagne Prize as far as the achievements of the recipient are concerned in promoting the growing together of Europe. As President of the French Republic, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing defended his country's interests yet always kept hold of the interests of Europe as a whole. He is therefore true to the tradition of Europe's founding fathers. They were firmly convinced that Europe would not survive another war and that the only chance lay in ever closer cooperation between the European nations. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing always saw European cooperation in a historic perspective. In his autobiography, he writes of the need for a new renaissance. Only thus, he goes on, can we prevent Europe's historic fall. He used this as his motto. Many of the key projects of European integration would not have happened without his impetus and contributions. This is particularly true of the European Monetary System that he developed and carried through with his friend Helmut Schmidt, and the European Council. Jean Monnet once said to Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, "The creation of the European Council for which you can take credit is the most important decision on the road towards European unity since the signing of the Treaty of Rome!" The current debates on the President of the European Council show how right he was in attaching so much importance of the European Council. Giscard d'Estaing is one of the few politicians in Europe who were able to gain experience in almost all European institutions, in the European Council, in the Committee of the Regions and in the European Parliament. When it was time to find a chairman for the difficult and demanding task of presiding over the European Convention it was no surprise that many proposed the name Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. "We need intelligence and experience and in both fields Giscard d'Estaing is one of the best candidates to be found in today's Europe." These are the words President Chirac used when promoting the candidacy of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. I have nothing to add. When you opened the Convention on 28 February 2002, you said, "We can indeed dream of Europe, and persuade others to share that dream!" A European constitution is of course not just a dream of and for lawyers, rather it also reflects our fervent wish to see Europe at peace united and able to act in the long term. The Convention was and is a big experiment where people with different constitutional traditions and different historic experiences come together. You could however tap the experience of my predecessor Roman Herzog in the Convention on the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It was a boon for the

work of the Convention that you were a good and strict Chairman. You made full use of all the possibilities inherent in your office and provided the Convention with much momentum. From the outset, you made clear that the Convention will only be successful when it presents one single draft constitution and not several variations. You believed that only a good result from the Convention can lead to rapid agreement at the subsequent intergovernmental conference. You really did take risks as the Chairman of the Convention. Your proposals on the European institutions came as a surprise and were controversial. They were harshly criticized by the public. But everyone knew and thus accepted that you wanted as good and as clear results as possible. You do not want simply to be content with the lowest common denominator.

III.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing is the eighth French figure to be awarded the Charlemagne Prize. No other country, not even Germany, has provided more recipients, although we want to take some of the credit for you - after all, you were born in Koblenz. Your accolade also pays tribute to Franco-German cooperation. Particularly in difficult times, it is especially important for Europe. You yourself, Mr Chairman, pointed out that "in the history of Europe, the times when the Germans and French stood shoulder to shoulder have always been times of progress". Of course the French and Germans often have differing interests and views. Thus they worked hard to find compromises. The other member states whose positions often lay between those of the Germans and the French were then almost always able to support this compromise. This, too, reveals the importance of the Franco-German engine for Europe. Franco-German cooperation was always especially successful when it was geared to winning over and enlisting others and also taking account of the interests of the smaller member states of the European Union. Over the years and across all party lines, the Franco-German tandem has proved its worth - from Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle to Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand and finally Gerhard Schröder and Jacques Chirac. You yourself, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, together with Helmut Schmidt formed a European dreamteam.

IV.

Tomorrow the plenary of the European Convention will be debating for the first time on the basis of a complete draft constitution. The work of the Convention is thus entering a decisive phase. I would like to extend a call to all members of the Convention: find a

result together which is good for the whole of Europe and which all can endorse at the intergovernmental conference! Europe can only succeed when the large, medium-sized and smaller countries reconcile their interests. All have to be able to say at the end, all states and also all citizens: Yes, this is our constitution! This is the only way for European awareness to grow further. You, the members of the Convention, can write a new, important chapter of European history. Be courageous! Give Europe a future! Europe, that is the citizens of our continent. The idea and reality of the European Union thrive on their approval. The European constitution should fulfil four primary tasks: It should create more transparency and make the European decision-making processes comprehensible and efficient; It should strengthen democracy in Europe and give the European Parliament more rights, including the right to elect the President of the Commission; The Constitution should clearly delimit the competences of the Union and those of the member states in line with the principle of subsidiarity; And it should protect the balance between the institutions of the Union. I am well aware that not everyone has a wholly positive view of a constitution for Europe. Some are concerned such a constitution could mean shifts of power and the fading of identity. Vigilance is rightly called for here. We must keep hold of the equal position of large and small states. This has made the European Union into a success story in history and in the world that is unprecedented and yet sets precedents. All put their trust in the fact that quite different partners work together on the basis of equality and forego part of their national sovereignty in their own interest and in the interest of the Community. Thus, I say that no-one can be or can want to be number one in Europe. In less than a year, ten more countries will belong to the European Union. Thus the unnatural division of Europe will be overcome. Europe is drawing together again. Even with 25 member states and a constitution, the European Union is not complete. At the very dawn of European cooperation, Jean Monnet said, "Europe is not static, rather Europe is always in the making."

V.

The crisis about Iraq in recent months led to differences of opinion also between governments in Europe. There was much more agreement between the citizens of Europe. We now have to ask ourselves what role Europe wants to and can play internationally and what responsibility it is to assume. We have to agree on shared goals and on instruments to achieve these goals. The people expect Europe to pull

together. We can build on a broad foundation of shared values and convictions. Democracy, human rights, the rule of law and a socially committed market economy are firmly anchored in the European Union. These are values to which the new member states are also committed. The shared experience of European wars is a source of our yearning for peace. Paradoxically it is also part of our European identity. Until the recent past, Europe had different historical experiences. For decades, the people in one half of our continent had to live in totalitarian regimes. The freedom we have regained enables us to rediscover our shared history and build Europe together. We can only bring weight to bear not least in foreign policy when we pool our strengths. For this, we need more self-awareness and more self-confidence, more solidarity and more loyalty. The shift to majority decisions, a solidarity clause and consultation mechanisms, a European foreign minister, perhaps in the future even a common European diplomatic service - these can all be important elements of a common foreign and security policy in the European Union. Thus it can become a strong partner in the world.

VI.

Even now, the European Union plays an important role on the global stage: It is the world's biggest trading power. We are working to ensure that weaker states gain fair market access, that trade barriers are removed. The European Union and its member states are making the world's largest contribution to global financial and technical assistance for the poorer countries of the world. It promotes regional cooperation, also on other continents. Thus it promotes political stability and economic development in many countries. The European Union is working to ensure the natural sources of life remain intact on our planet and it works to secure the rule of law. Despite all the problems, weaknesses and all the major shortfalls, this is the beginning of a common foreign policy.

VII.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, you once said, "One of the prerequisites for ending Europe's historic decline is to develop a common perception of European security." Here, too, there has been progress. The European Union today plays a vital role in securing freedom and promoting political stability in the Balkans. We were pained to learn that the use of violence can be necessary as the ultima ratio. That is why European security policy needs a military component alongside all the civilian means. The European Union

and NATO of course have to work hand in hand. It is good that the European Union can have recourse to the military assets and capabilities of NATO. If we want to solve regional conflicts and if we want to be successful in the fight against international terrorism, we have to consider the causes of the conflicts and violence. Poverty, social injustice and fear of cultural alienation are a breeding ground for many regional conflicts and also for terrorism. European policy has to use its economic, financial and political possibilities here. We certainly know that conflicts can only be effectively solved when there is agreement amongst the international community.

VIII.

Today, just like after the Second World War and at the end of the 1980s, Europe faces major decisions. We Europeans have the opportunity to define our role in the world. Only a united Europe can have an effective influence on decisions in the United Nations, can be a strong pillar in NATO and a reliable partner of the United States. We have achieved much on the road to a united Europe, to a Europe in which large and small states work together on the basis of equality, in which we are developing a shared identity and yet maintaining the diversity of our cultures. We need visions and the courage to continue along this road. This is what we want: to deepen unity and preserve diversity. One thing is certain: Europe has to be united or it will become meaningless. The unification of a free Europe has often been the focus of much discussion. It is to bring peace and security to our old continent. We have succeeded. You, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, have rendered a contribution that Europe will not forget.