

In 1985 it was decided to make Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, the shattering finale of the composer's Ninth Symphony, the official anthem of the European Union. The message was as clear as it was uplifting. A truly united Europe would also be a *brotherly* Europe. It would be so much more than a pragmatic, primarily economic arrangement between separate nation-states. Indeed, it would be a new kind of community, an enlightened community, which would be held together by a deep mutual understanding. An understanding not only of a common cultural heritage, but also of our shared humanity.

The German poet Schiller's romantic outburst, set to Beethoven's intoxicating music, was from then on performed at all important „European” occasions and ceremonies, most famously in Berlin after the tearing down of the Wall in 1989. The music was nothing less than a call to arms through art, a declaration of love no longer to God, but to Man itself. It held the promise that in the future Man would be able to rise above himself, to finally leave behind the limitations of nationality, race, class and gender. A united Europe, though still very much a work in progress, and far from being fully realized, would one day be the perfect expression of this sentiment.

This commitment to Enlightenment-values was always risky. Looking back from our own more skeptical, disillusioned times such optimism may seem misguided, or at least naïve. But at the time, as some of you here tonight may perhaps remember, this sentiment was widely shared, though maybe not as passionately as Friedrich Schiller expressed it. Some time ago I spoke to the well-known French historian and sociologist Ivan Jablonka,

who recently wrote a little book about the holidays in his youth, during the Eighties, while he travelled with his parents across Europe in a Volkswagen-minivan. His essay is called *En Camping-car*. In it he describes how his memories of these exciting explorations of Europe were infused with the relentless optimism of those days.

For Jablonka and his family that optimism was certainly hard-earned. They were part of the dark side of European history. Both his grandparents on his father's side of the family were murdered in Auschwitz. After the War Jablonka's father grew up in orphanages owned by Jewish-communist organizations. That the Jablonka family travelled through Europe in a Volkswagen-van was both very symbolic and ironic. Volkswagen was the car touted by Adolf Hitler, used as a symbol of the social, economic and technological success of the Third Reich. For Jablonka and his parents their holidays were both a revenge on the past as an escape from it. „In our camper,„ Jablonka told me, „we reversed the track of the trains to Auschwitz. *We* drove towards freedom and fun.”

This world of great expectations, Jablonka added, now no longer exists. The Europe he lives in now, with antisemitism and nationalism again on the rise, does no longer resemble the Europe of his youth. The future is very uncertain. We don't know where we are heading with Europe. I am sure there will not be many among you who still think the destination of the future will be just freedom and fun.

Though an united Europe has proved a success in many ways, the brotherhood promised by Schiller and Beethoven has not been so easily attained.

Or maybe not at all.

Perhaps we should not be surprised. Freedom, equality, brotherhood – of that glorious slogan of the French Revolution, brotherhood has always been the odd one out. It is so hard to define brotherhood. Freedom and equality are concerned with the relationship of the individual and the society of which he or she is a member. Though complicated ideas, they can, up to a point, be measured and regulated and protected. We can put the measure of freedom and equality into statistics.

But *brotherhood*?

Brotherhood is an affair of people between themselves. It can be encouraged but has to come from inside. It cannot be instilled from above. You cannot impose brotherhood by law.

And we all know what a fragile thing brotherhood can be. How easily love can turn into distaste – and also into undying hate. Also, brotherhood can slip from a more universal affinity with fellow human beings, into a far narrower concept of brotherhood – the exclusive love of the group, people who resemble you, people who look like you, people who think like you, people who are part of the same nation as you.

The problem with the first kind of brotherhood is that the more it is inclusive, the more *abstract* it becomes. That is the great curse of liberalism. Brotherhood as an abstract concept, a lazy shorthand for universalism, the worn, hopelessly bureaucratized language of inclusiveness – the more generalized it becomes, the easier it becomes to attack and to ridicule it.

This is nothing new. As the French ultra-conservative thinker Joseph de Maistre put it scathingly, when he attacked the French Constitution of 1795: „the constitution [...] has been drawn up for Man. Now, there is no such thing in the world as Man. In the course of my life, I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc. I am even aware, thanks to Montesquieu that one can be a Persian. But, as for Man, I declare that I never met him in my life. If he exists, I certainly have no knowledge of him.”

Just look at the tensions that threaten to tear Europe apart today. Basically it is the two ideas of brotherhood competing with each other. On the one hand, the enlightened, universal idea of brotherhood that transcends narrow ideas of culture and belonging. On the other hand the idea of brotherhood that stems from the tradition of Counter-Enlightenment thinking, the conviction that a shared notion of Nation, culture, history bind people together far more intensely than abstract notions of Man and shared humanity. That is the message of the Counter-Enlightenment: people are not really equal, if you think about it. And by consequence should not be treated as such.

I think the far-right ideologue of the Austrian Freedom Party, Andreas Mölzer recently summed it up perfectly in an interview for a Dutch magazine.

„Sure, we believe in freedom,” he said, „But we believe in *our* freedom.”

I do not need to tell you that with the rise of national-populism you can find these tensions all over Europe. In some countries, like Great-Britain after the Brexit-referendum, it almost looks like Civil War. Now that Europe is on the defense against its own critics from within, some of which want

openly to destroy the EU, some thinkers and commentators have become obsessed with the flaws of the European project.

These flaws are evident and should never be overlooked: too little democracy, too much bureaucracy. Too many technocrats, too few romantics. Too much division, not enough purpose. Too many figures, statistics, too many procedures and regulations. Too few ideas.

The first idea of brotherhood, that has been so much a part of the European imagination from the start, has indeed become a bit of a cliché. An overfamiliar, rather empty gesture. More importantly, is also seen by its critics as a comfortable idea of a well-off elite of progressives, an idea that they celebrate joyously in conferences and festivals, but excludes people who have less reason to celebrate. There is a lot of preaching to the already converted, far less attempts to persuade people who have a far different view of the blessings of united Europe. Also, the universalism of the European project is definitely stained by being seen as synonym for globalization and neo-liberalism.

But all these criticisms of the European Union, dominant as they are in the public debate, do not mean the idea of a united Europe is lost. Not at all. Recent polls still show a large support for the European Union, so large that many anti-European parties, also in the Netherlands and in France, no longer talk of leaving the Union.

If we want to reinvigorate the idea of Europe as a community of shared values, it is our duty to address these criticisms with an open mind, not hide in safe rhetoric of empty talk. And we should admit that the brotherhood as

celebrated by Beethoven and Schiller will always be something that can easily escape our reach. We strive for it, but it remains a struggle. Not only because of our opponents, the followers of De Maistre, but also because of the divided soul in our own breasts.

That's because cultural differences exist, and it is dangerous to deny them. I am Dutch, you are French – it would be plain stupid to assume we look at everything in the same way. On the other hand, it is even more dangerous to think that these differences can never be overcome, that they are set in stone, that culture is everything.

There is culture, but there also is Art. True art can never deny the individual behind this abstract idea of Man. Only in art can our divided souls, our inner contradictions, be freely explored. Art is part of our culture, but it also capable of overturning our narrow ideas about ourselves and the Other, it can overthrow our cultural prejudices, undermine our cherished notions of our own history and traditional ways of doing, it can make us discover our own humanity - but also our profoundly inhuman impulses. That is exactly the reason why so many proponents of an idea of national culture, really hate art. True art is always ambivalent. And in these polarized times, ambivalence is more and more seen as something suspicious and weak.

The performance you are about to see explores the ambivalence about an united Europe through many, many different voices.

Some loud, some quiet. Some rational, some romantic. Some visionary, some pragmatic. Some euphoric, some deeply suspicious.

Together they make us feel that for all our differences, we have shared a common history for the past sixty years. This is a history in which progress alternates with throwbacks, illusion with disillusion, brilliant ideas with tremendously stupid mistakes – in short, just like any history. What is shows, at least what it showed *me*, is that in the end we have far more in common than what separates us. It will also make you feel, as it made me feel, that the idea of a united Europe may be heavily contested, but it is very much alive. And it is, at least for me, very much worth fighting for.

Thank you.