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I am the normal one: The soccer fans amongst you might recognize this quote: Thus introduced himself in rather awkward English Jürgen Klopp as the new head coach of FC Liverpool in 2015.

I, too, am the normal one: a normal German, a normal European citizen. And it is in that capacity that I am speaking to you tonight. What I have to offer are strictly my personal views. I no longer serve in the Federal President's Office which I have done for 19 years in leading positions. Today I humbly try to serve an idea close to my heart and I try to serve Anglo-German friendship. Thank you for having me.

Tonight I want to talk about Europe's future. Some of you might ask: is there such a thing: Europe? Does it have a future? And: What does that matter to us? I will try to approach these questions not by adding yet another version to the reform scenarios for the European Union Jean Claude Juncker, the President of the Commission recently presented. He did that also with a view to next week's European Jubilee Summit celebrating the signing of the Treaties of Rome 60 years ago. Nor will I talk about the changes desperately needed with respect to the monetary union or the management of the refugee crisis. And I will not address the Elephant in the room: Britain's decision to leave the Union.

Instead of analysing intergovernmental relations in Europe or the state of European institutions, instead of speculating about the consequences the elections in France in May or in Germany in September might have for the great idea of an ever closer union, I want to focus on those who brought about this very idea: I want to talk about the people in Europe. I strongly believe: It is the citizens who called for Europe, it is the citizens who formed it, it is the citizens who have to revitalize it.

I am such a citizen: I grew up in a small town in North-Western Germany, in Westphalia, right next to the Dutch border. When I was a kid there was still a border separating two countries with a difficult common history.

Today – with the border gone for over 30 years due to the Schengen agreement - it no longer matters on what side of the former demarcation line one lives or works – at least as long as the Netherlands do not play against Germany in a match of soccer. Dutch people buy houses in my hometown, Germans work as lawyers or bakers in the Netherlands, students studying at the renowned University of Twente find cheap housing in my boring little town across the border. Everyday exchange just like that between England and Scotland – at least for the time being. You might imagine how relieved people especially in my hometown are with regard to

the results of the Dutch elections this week. If the populist Geerd Wilders had won it would have been a terrible blow to the normality of German-Dutch relations in Europe.

My hometown is also the seat of the administration of the oldest so-called Euregio. Founded in 1958 it today links almost 130 towns and villages, promoting economic cooperation, joint infrastructural planning and trans-national cultural exchange. One of the most recent symbols of transnational cooperation is a cross-border nursing home for senior citizens. The building was constructed in such a way that it is based both on Dutch and German ground, overarching a pathway that marks the former borderline. The elderly residents move freely from the German to the Dutch part of their building. Imagine if the Schengen agreement would be cancelled: As a resident of that senior citizen home you would constantly have to carry your passport along with your walking aide.

Europe has changed so much in our lives – and much for the better. But we no longer appreciate what has been achieved. Sometimes it helps to look at Europe from a distance. In the early nineties I studied political science in the United States. My professors and my fellow students were all very interested in the great experiment of integration that Europe stood for at that time. I remember very well watching the opening ceremony of the Albertville Olympics in 1992 – the year the Maastricht treaty came into force. The French celebrated their European vocation on the occasion with Beethoven's 9. Symphony and a gigantic European flag in the Olympic stadium. Sitting in my Washington flat I felt very proud and very European.

How different the impression 20 years later, 2012 in London. To be sure: A great, impressive, entertaining Olympic opening ceremony. A proud celebration of Britain's unique history, its great traditions and achievements. You Britons must have felt very happy with yourselves that day – and rightly so! Yet not one reference to Britain's membership in the EU. A forecast probably of last June's referendum's outcome.

How would I look to Europe if I was living in Washington these days? Certainly I would have lost quite a few illusions about European solidarity and the workings of European institutions. Certainly I would feel a lot more sober with respect to the growth of a European identity. Certainly I would feel disappointment about what national governments have failed to do with European money and European regulations. Certainly I would be worried about rising nationalism and xenophobia across Europe. And yet: More than ever would I feel the need for a Europe strong and united. A Europe sober and focussed on the values it stands for and the achievements it has brought about. A Europe able and willing to respond jointly to the new geopolitical challenges embodied in authoritarian leaders like Russia's Putin and Turkey's Erdogan or reckless populists like Donald Trump

We Europeans have lost our senses – our European senses. We have lost out of sight what Europe was like when nationalism ruled, when borders were fenced, when trade faced barriers, when political dissens resulted in open, often armed conflict. We no longer

appreciate that Europe enjoys unprecedented wealth, social security and infrastructural modernity – even in the crisis-stricken parts of Southern Europe.

We have forgotten that Europeans once fought for freedom and cooperation: It was the passion of French, Germans, Dutch, Italiens that tore down border fences in the early 50s of the last century. It was the courage of Eastern Europeans that brought down walls and iron curtains in the wake of the peaceful revolutions of 1989. It was the people who united Europe – and today they should not allow populists to divide it again and bureaucrats to steal away its soul.

We need a fresh start in Europe. For that fresh start we should not look to Brussels or to national governments in the first place. We should look to ourselves and we should ask ourselves: What is that we can do to keep inter-European relations strong – even in times when political and economic ties are severed?

To that question you and the partnership between Harpenden and Alzey is one answer. There are almost 40.000 twin town initiatives in Europe these days. A lot of them date back to the early years after World War II. Your partnership with Alzey was founded in 1963 – long before Britain joined the European Community. And speaking to this audience tonight I am sure this partnership will survive Brexit. That should be your mission.

In the early days these twin town initiatives offered a unique way of getting to know each other better with exchange programs for students and local politicians. My first trip to England was made possible because of the partnership between my hometown and Bromsgrove, a city in the West Midlands. My school organized the trip – including a visit to Coventry Cathedral, this impressive memorial against war and for reconciliation. To me the Coventry Cross of Nails is a strong symbol – especially today. When you visit the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche in the heart of Berlin, you will also find a Cross of Nails from Coventry. Right in front of that church, on December 19, people died because of a terrorist attack - an attack against the values of an open society, of peace, individual freedom, tolerance. An attack against our way of life. The Coventry Cross tells us: We need to stand together and we have to stand up for the values we believe in.

This morning in Berlin, at Schönefeld Airport, I have been in the Easy Jet line with so many young people. I don't know what their plans were: a weekend of clubbing in London, an interview for a scholarship in Edinburgh, an internship in Brussels, a meeting with friends in Barcelona, a visit to the family in Kracow. But I do know what they might not be aware of: this easy way of travelling all across Europe without visa and for decent fares would not be possible if it weren't for the achievements of the European Union. This generation Easy Jet should become the Generation Europe. Polls shows us that the young people in Germany have great confidence in the future European Union (57% have great or very great confidence). Despite the severe problems that especially young people face in Spain, Italy and Greece,

they, too, lay their hopes on Europe. I think it is a great idea to present every young European with an Interrail ticket at his 18. birthday: A ticket that allows for limitless travelling by train all over Europe. The idea was brought up recently by two young Germans and bottom-up it has gained momentum: The European Parliament has voted for the initiative. It will cost about a billion a year. Money well spent because it's an investment in Europe's future.

One of Europe's greatest achievements is in my view the ERASMUS program. It celebrates its 30. anniversary this year. Over time it has allowed more than three million young Europeans to study in another European country. Of the 125.000 students from EU countries currently studying at British universities, almost a quarter receive ERASMUS funds. ERASMUS is not only a booster for an international education: About a third of the ERASMUS alumni find their partners for life in another European country. If I was a member of the jury for the International Karlspreis, the most prestigious award for European achievements, I would have given it to the people at ERASMUS this year. Instead it will go to Timothy Garton Ash who teaches history not far from here at Oxford. And to be sure: The eminent historian and devoted European certainly deserves the award. Because like the ERASMUS program he is a source of inspiration for a Europeaness that seems to be outdated, but is so very timely.

We need inspiration embodied in people. I have found my personal role model in a friend who also happens to be a friend of Quentin Peel's - the journalist who addressed you last year. Barbara Monheim is a lady in her sixties. Born and raised in Poland she fled to Germany in the days of the Martial Law in 1982. She married a well-to-do heir of a chocolate dynasty. Instead of living the life of a rich lady of leisure sipping coffee and eating chocolate, she opened her house on Lake Wannsee for discussions and campaigns to promote the Eastern enlargement of the European Union. When that was achieved she focussed on the young generation: Inviting young people especially from the East to meet with high-level European politicians and intellectuals. For that she established the BELA foundation. BELA stands for „Broader European Leadership Agenda“. Tirelessly she speaks and works for a Europe whole, democratic and free, because she knows so very well what it means to live under a dictatorship. I am happy to support her endeavors – and so is Quentin Peel.

For young people those historic memories might be too far-fetched. Sometimes it helps not to look into history but into literature. Which brings me straight to, well, Harry Potter. My daughters have understood how quickly a society can become a totalitarian nightmare when they read „Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix“. They understand what fake news means, what happens when the freedom of speech is challenged and people are persecuted because they do not belong to the right race or belief. In a way, J.K. Rowling contributed to my girls' political education – probably more than their teachers and we parents did. And Harry Potter certainly contributed to the admiration and sympathy we all have for almost all things British.

We can count on the young generation for the future – but it is on us to shape the present in such a way that they will have a future. These days, in more than 30 cities in Germany and in many cities across Europe people of all generations take to the streets to demonstrate for democratic

values and European partnership. The movement „Pulse of Europe“ is gaining momentum: In Berlin alone 5500 people last week. If I were in Berlin tomorrow I would join the weekly demonstration on the Gendarmenmarkt, Berlin’s most beautiful square. And a very European location at the same time. It features the French Dome – a church built by the Prussian king for French Huguenots, protestant refugees who laid the economic foundations for Prussia’s rise. Reportedly the Gendarmenmarkt served as the blueprint for the Royal Naval College in Greenwich. In the center of the square stands a statue of Friedrich Schiller, whose „Ode to Joy“ – along with Beethoven’s music – became Europe’s unofficial hymn. The most famous line runs: Alle Menschen werden Brüder, wo Dein sanfter Friede weilt“ (All men become brothers where your tender wings linger).

You might call that German idealism or even naivité. Yet: I do believe in the power of joy shared and friendship celebrated. That is why I am here tonight. This is to joy and friendship in challenging times.