

## **WUJA – European Encounters**

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### **Preserving Europe's integrity and values in the face of the mounting migration crises**

Dear Friends, dear Alumni,

The speaker you have in front of you does not pretend to be a specialist on the matter of refugees and migrants, but this speech finds its origin in the fact that I am a board member of the local office of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Belgium.

This local office has produced recently a document that is to the best of my knowledge the first attempt by such a local office to propose a holistic view on this matter of refugees and migrants, aiming at giving an advocacy standpoint on behalf of these people while trying to put the whole issue in a broader context where other opinions and fears are met.

This text was intended to be a document to be sent to our Alumni to touch them emotionally, but also to convince them rationally, so that they would join our efforts to sensitize people on this burning issue.

Still, this speech is based not only on ideas from this text, but also on additional personal ideas. His style will be more political and engages your servant alone.

There are two ways for Europe to die: being overwhelmed by the uncontrolled arrival of hordes of migrants, or losing the values that made who we are.

#### ***1. The first way to die for Europe: being overwhelmed by hordes of migrants***

We all know that on the long haul the massive and disorderly arrival of too many migrants would risk disemboweling our societies and ultimately derailing our democracies, which are both neither ready, not willing to take up that challenge.

It would first risk dislocating our social structures, putting an unbearable weight on our social security, putting pressure on our school and health systems, on our security forces and more generally on the whole administrative apparatus of our states.

It would also rapidly derail our democracies in the sense that, confronted with such massive arrivals of migrants, a large portion of our population would simply not accept it, seeking refuge in an opposition that would epitomize in the emergence of populist parties at best, fascist parties at worst. Rapidly, different communities would confront each other with all the risk that goes with the

phenomenon: attacks, retaliation, sense of fear and spiralling violence, massive presence of security forces creating a sense of permanent emergency.

One might argue that this is far from happening and that with the exception of the remarkable events in Germany during the summer and the autumn 2015 (without forgetting the traditional hospitality of countries like Sweden) we are nowhere close to the description above.

On the contrary, it seems to me that when one sees what the outcry has been in many countries and even in some countries that saw almost no refugees come to them (for different reasons), there is reason to believe that the positions of many people would become even stiffer with a more ample migration.

### **Acknowledgement of what is now happening**

And indeed, we have good reasons to believe that this is only the beginning. We haven't seen anything yet, because the factors that are at the roots of migration have not yet come into full swing.

Migration finds its origin in basically four realities: political oppression, economic despair, demographic explosion and climatic change.

Political oppression by authoritarian regimes is of course a very visible root cause for migration and more especially for the refugees fleeing their country out of fear for their life because of religious, racial or political reasons. The inability of many countries to erect functioning entities where human rights, separation of powers, separation of church and state, free elections, etc. are respected is creating the conditions for the departure of many people, notably some of the elites.

The state of economic dereliction due to internal, but also external causes is amplified by the inefficiency and the corruption of some regimes, exacerbated by the absence of a well functioning state, i.e. based on the rule of law and a working administration. The absence of entrepreneurship for whatever reason leaves some economies with the sole prospect of agriculture, mainly of survival, and commerce, allowing the exchange of merely artisanal products.

The demographic explosion on the African continent is a much under-estimated factor of migration. When there is not enough land to cultivate, even if climate conditions are ok, people tend to move to places where there is space and opportunity to nourish their families and themselves. When there are not enough jobs, even of a low standard, in stagnating economies and when a job occupied by one person retiring could be filled in by up to three, four or five younger people, the exodus is near.

The climate change has not yet sorted out all its effects either. Desertification, deforestation, reduction of the hydrographic basins, multiplication of tornadoes and torrential rains or floods from rivers and oceans are all phenomena that

affect mainly less advanced countries, forcing populations to find their salvation elsewhere.

Note that some of these factors can combine and reinforce each other. For example, climate change can cause some areas to become unfit to sustain a certain population like in the Sahel or the East African Horn. Demographic tensions can lead to war and genocide, as we have seen in the case of Rwanda, whose tragedy was also about the control of the available parcels of land and which resulted in the outflow from populations into the much less populated Democratic Republic of Congo. As a case in point, the consequences of climate change, like bad harvests, can lead to an economic implosion whose effects an inefficient leadership tends to aggravate and which ultimately leads to turmoil and repression. The example of Syria is particularly telling in that respect. The Arab spring in 2011, for sure, came about through a desire of the population to emulate what was going on in other countries, but the unrest was also the consequence of several consecutive bad harvests the years before, attributable to climate change.

The two most predictable of these factors are demographics and climate change. For the first one, we know the maths and if nothing changes in the birth rate on the African continent, we know that from 1,2 billion people as we speak, it could reach 2 billions in 2035 and 4 billions by the end of the century. As far as the second is concern, the models of climatologists can rather accurately predict, depending on the increase in temperatures, the type of effects global warming will have on climate, that is on agriculture and biodiversity, hydrography and forestry, etc.

The two factors that mostly derive from the first two are the political situation and the economic distress. Even if both can have their own dynamics, they will tend more and more to be the result of the first two. It is obvious for the economic backwardness, but also for the political instability, as it is clear that even with the best democratic intentions some governments are facing almost insuperable challenges if they are left alone to take them up.

### **Is there anything to be done?**

After such grim depiction, one might wonder whether there is überhaupt anything that can be done. Before answering that question, it needs be said that the developed countries, especially the Western countries, are heavily entangled with the origin of some the problems causing migration. It is particularly true for the economic situation of these countries and with the climate change. It is less so for the political situation, though we have not been always well advised, to say the least, in the way we have tried, either to force the advent of democracy, or to accompany the transition to it. Only the last factor, demographics, seems to be somewhat unrelated with the behaviour of the West, but a deeper analysis would show that our vision of the world might have played a role here also.

The truth is that for some of these factors we are responsible for what is happening and should not happen, and culpable for what should happen and does not happen.

In the realm of economy, we master the so-called 'terms of the exchange', i.e. we impose our trade rules, our pricing system, our technical norms, to a point where many less developed countries have only the choice between abiding by our rules or closing themselves to the rest of the world. We impose our techno-structure that is almost exclusively based on competition, much less on cooperation about which we so often boast in Europe.

In terms of environment, we apply double standards. What we would not do anymore in our Western countries, we agree to do in other countries, like polluting heavily. Our way of consuming and our way of producing has triggered the part of the global warming that can beyond doubt be attributed to mankind. But the tragic irony is that the consequences of the climate change, caused by the global warming, strike above all the countries that have had no responsibility in creating it...

Politically, we have been supporting regimes in contradiction with all the values we cherish, simply because these regimes were stabilizing their state and fixing their population, so that we would not be confronted with massive migration to our continent.

As far as demographics are concerned, we have imposed a worldview that is not the one we observe at home. In these faraway countries, the influence of the Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent of the protestant churches, all originating from Europe, has not done anything against and has even promoted an unsustainable birth rate, in full contradiction with our own habitus.

It is not difficult to see that all these issues are related to the question of justice in the broadest sense of the word. The Society of Jesus has committed to help alleviate the suffering of the refugees and migrants, victims of injustice of different kinds, when they founded in 1981 the Jesuit Refugee Service. It is even before that year that the Jesuits under the impulsion of Pedro Arrupe have made a clear link between the service of faith and the promotion of justice, especially economic justice. But, it is more recently that they made a clear relationship between justice and one of its realms, being environment.

We all know also that in the delicate question of demographics, many Jesuits engaged on the ground are using their discernment and their conscience to promote contraception. And, politically, Jesuits have developed numerous centres of social or political studies throughout the world to educate people they can reach to and offer basic or on-going formation.

After having seen what the consequences could be for us of a situation whose dynamics would go on unabated, and after having recognized honestly that our responsibility is heavily engaged in the current situation, the question remains: what to do then?

Indebted by our responsibility and facing the prospect of having these factors unleashing even further an unbridled migration, we should – out of realism, as much as out of conscience – take bold moves to tackle these challenges.

And there are things that can be done, in every domain we just reviewed.

Tackling the challenge of climate change requests action both at home and abroad, at home to prevent a further contribution of ours to the overall degradation of the situation and abroad to try and limit the impact on countries already affected by worsening climatic conditions. That implies also to develop strategies to allow clean energy production to favour local development without adding to the CO2 emissions.

The uncontrolled demographic explosion in Africa demands a decisive action from European countries towards the governments of this continent to condition the continuation of development aid to the creation of programs of family planning with the help of international and local NGO's. The same not-for-profit organisations should also be financed by Europe to help fix the people, especially the younger generations, by sketching them the true reality of existence in Europe.

After so many failed attempts, the economic take-off of North and Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as Middle East and countries further away, cannot rely anymore on the sole development aid. It requires, as proposed by Germany, a massive development scheme, that for the sake of simplicity could be dubbed as a 'Marshall Plan', but would be articulated primarily around a massive injection of capital and investments through the settlement of European companies on the ground.

Politically, there is no doubt that the European Union has to become serious in its capacity of projecting a military force. There are cases where it is of utmost importance to prevent political, racial or religious conflicts to escalate, when it is still time to do so, or to intervene on the ground when things have already gone bad. Even if that has to take place with the logistical help of NATO or the USA, it is up to the EU to build this intervention force and to effectively use it.

All the actions above have one common denominator, in order to pursue them: a more united Europe, with a strong core of countries willing to move forward and build the necessary co-operations to make these policies possible.

For Europe, this is not a 'nice-to-have', it is a 'must have', as the injustice created or tolerated will boomerang in our face, if we are not able to organize justice.

## ***2. The second way to die for Europe: losing our values that made who we are***

The second way for Europe to die is to renounce our values. These values are an irradiating light that is visible in the world. In that respect, I have always

considered Europe to be a beacon on the hill. And you don't light a lamp to cover it. The pride of being European should be at the core of our attitude.

But some may argue that there is no reason to be proud to be European. And indeed, we made the world for the worst. On the outside, we pursued colonization, launched crusades, practiced slavery, committed genocides, brought in brutal evangelization and forced conversion, looted and exploited. On the inside: we waged religious wars and instituted Inquisition, we practiced ethnic or religious cleansing, we multiplied nationalistic wars and made ourselves guilty of a double genocide.

But, at the same time, we made the world also for the best: we invented the human rights and the democracy, the free market economy and the social security, the sense of progress and the modernity, we established the principles of separating state and religion, we accomplished innumerable achievements in all fields of human activity benefitting the whole world, in science and technique, art and culture.

Sure, we made the world for the worst, but even more often for the best. We even made America, historically a projection of Europe...

### **The feeling of being different in our way of doing things**

All this explains the appeal of Europe to people as individuals, refugees and migrants, and to countries, as collective entities that want to join the EU. Let us see reality the way it is: our prosperity of course is a powerful drive for people to come, but so are also our freedom and our democratic principles, that not only protect their physical integrity, but make their life decent and worthwhile. Our Western culture plays like a magnet by allowing these same people to live an interesting and content-rich life, where they decide about what they want to achieve. Our principles and our culture are themselves underpinned by our Christian values that made them possible, not the least because Christianity is the religion of the exit of religion.

Renouncing all these values, turning our back to all these accomplishments boils down to obliterating our history and writing off our patrimony. Without a past, there is no future, without the fundamentals to build upon, there cannot be a solid house. Renouncing our values and our principles would be renouncing to our distinctive and often unique way of doing things, it would mean to accept that we are not different from others in the world.

We need to welcome refugees because of our legal obligation, that is the international treaties we have signed. We can welcome them out of sheer compassion. We may even welcome them out of selfish interest when it comes to a much-needed workforce compensating an ailing demography. But the true reason why we should open our arms is that they present us the mirror in which we look at ourselves. Are we seeing ourselves as smiling in this mirror or as grimacing?

## **What are we left with to do?**

There is a difficult balance to be struck to welcome people at the same moment when we say and repeat that we want our continent to remain distinctive.

At the helm of this movement of higher conscience, the elite has to take up its responsibility. The work of this elite is to be part of the solution, not of the problem. Being part of the problem only requires mediocre people, being part of the solution requires quality people. That is why we need to urge our fellow Alumni to enter in politics.

The first task of this elite is to open our eyes to see that refugees exist, is to open our ears to what they have to say, to dialog with them to let them enrich us. The second task of this elite is to take our people by the hand. Let's explain to our people that integration is feasible, that we can afford to change a little.

Europe has historically been a continent of adaptation, of inclusion of other people, cultures and ideas. We tend to forget that it did not invent its religion, it borrowed it from the Middle East. It also imported the Greek-roman elements of law and culture, philosophy and organization and integrated so many other elements after that, including contributions from the civilisation of Islam.

We need to say to our people that we are strong enough to take the risk of little adjustments, as most of the way to be accomplished in the encounter between refugees and migrants and our indigenous population will be. Let us not even hesitate to submerge the newcomers with our culture, for we need to assume that if they have wanted to come to us, it is also because of what they perceived as being an attractive culture.

Let's explain to our people that Europe needs to and will remain distinctive. When we poise about the request of Pope Benedict XVI to go to the frontiers, we need to be coherent and make clear that frontiers still exist, that a centre remains a centre and a periphery a periphery and that, if centre and periphery have to be equalized, this should occur on our terms and conditions. You don't help people by being weak. Christ was not weak, he was gentle...

Let us not let our people live in fear, as fear is a bad counsellor, as is desolation, but let us give them pride again about who we are on the inside and let's give hope again on the outside that Europe is still Europe.

Willing to remain the beacon on the hill is accepting that people will want to reach that light. If we cover the lamp, for sure, no one will come to us any more, but we will be in the dark as well. An existential challenge is posed to us, but it can be won, because we are who we are and we have already come back from the brink. We overcame religious wars and nationalistic wars, which brought us to that brink of self-destruction.

I don't doubt about the success of Europe, because I don't doubt about its capacity of survival. As the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin put it: *Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst das Rettende auch*. Indeed, where there is danger, there also, does the salvation appear.

Thank you.