Defining Europe in the Year of the European Citizen
Address by President Michael D. Higgins

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En Sorbonne
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Monsieur le Recteur,
Madame la Présidente,

Is mian liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil libh as ucht bhúr chuireadh tíocht agus labhairt san ollscoil seo mar Uachtarán na hÉireann. Guidhím gach rath ar obair na foirne san Sorbonne agus traoslaím libh as an gcáil atá tuíte ag an ollscoil mar cheann de sna hionaid is tábhachtaithe d’obair intellectúil.

Thank you for your kind invitation to speak to you today in the University of Paris, the Sorbonne and for that warm introduction.

1. Je vous remercie de votre invitation à m’adresser à vous aujourd’hui, en Sorbonne, en tant que président irlandais. Je présente tous mes vœux de réussite à toute l’équipe de la Sorbonne, et je vous félicite de la réussite intellectuelle et de la renommée de votre université qui représente l’un des plus grands centres de travail intellectuel dans le monde. (Traduction : Clíona Ní Riordáin)
I would like to say at the outset that I know Jacques Delors had intended to be here today but circumstances have prevented him from doing so. I wish him well. I have had the pleasure in the past of participating in his earlier initiative “A Soul for Europe”.

Jacques Delors has long been a friend to Ireland and he knows us well. I am delighted that the think tank that he founded, Notre Europe, is a partner in this event today. Its immense contribution to the intellectual debate on Europe is valued in Paris, in Brussels and beyond.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend Notre Europe for the excellent, and very honest and sensitively titled survey of Ireland’s relationship with Europe: Forty Years a Growing.

Madame la Présidente,

It is deeply moving to be speaking in Paris and in an institution that has contributed so much to our attempts in Europe over the ages to put the stamp of humanity on our shared existence.

It is in Paris and its university lecture halls that so many of the concepts, the words, and the actions too, that were necessary if we were to put the stamp of reason on our lives together – lives that were entwined in so many fashions, in different periods of history – were introduced.

At so many of the great moments of change the role of Paris, its universities, its people, their discourse, their engagement with the wider world, was significant. What would be often referred to in countries struggling for independence or freedom, as the “French Ideas”, both before and after the French Revolution, had an enormous influence.

Sometimes the ideas were welcomed, eagerly sought out. More often they were feared, they were derided, or became the target of sanctions and censorship from those who held power, and by the beneficiaries of authoritarian or exclusive systems that were under threat from the emerging democratic movements in Paris, movements fashioned so often by intellectual migrants.

Paris has always been a special place for the migrant minds. In our present circumstances we have much to gain from the migratory mind of Europe. While James Joyce and Samuel Beckett may be the best known examples of the Irish migratory mind in the near modern period, Ireland has an old connection with Europe and France.

James Joyce’s manifesto to “Hibernicize Europe and Europeanize Ireland” was, we must remember, anticipated many centuries earlier by, for example, Columbanus and Gallus who brought precious scriptures and treatises from Bangor.
through France in the early 7th century; John Scotus Eriugena who brought Greek back into Europe after the dark ages, travelling all the way to the French King in the 9th century to translate the Pseudo-Dionysius from Greek into Latin; Peter of Ireland who taught Aquinas philosophy, and later Berkeley the “Irish Cartesian” who engaged with French thinkers like Malebranche in the 18th century, and since I am advocating a rethinking of economics, the Franco-Hibernian thinker Richard Cantillon, born in Kerry in 1680 whose essay *L’Essai sur la nature du commerce en general* in 1730 was described by William Stanley Jevons as constituting “the cradle of political economy” and which influenced Adam Smith and Karl Marx.

We Irish have a long history of travelling with intellectual curiosity and a subversive creativity, and Paris and the Sorbonne have constituted both a staging post and a destination. Referred to by James Joyce as “the last of the human cities”, Paris was, at the beginning of the twentieth century seen as one of the most appropriate locations for seeing one’s own people through the lens of exile, and mould-breaking writers such as James Joyce were not alone in utilizing the experience of exile, or the freedom and the company of fellow exiles, in Paris. For, as Paris was concerned, its diverse community of intellectual dissidents was far from limited to literature.

In the history of Irish political thought and action, Paris was frequently both source and inspiration of the radical ideas and actions that might lead to independence. The presence of some exiles in Paris may have come about, as is clear in the case of both James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, as a voluntary choice, because of what the city and its community promised and delivered too in terms of literary creativity and above all perhaps in the freedom to experiment in a conducive atmosphere, in the contestation of theory and the solidarity of ideas. Paris also served as a laboratory for political ideas for such as the Fenians and individual scholars who drew on the radical ideas that were available or emerging from within the walls of universities, but far more often from outside the walls. The discourse in the cafés, in the cellars, in the bars, sought to define the meaning and the realization of a republic, to discuss its possibilities of achievement, and what independence might bring with the promises of a republic including the promise of freedom, of dignity, of creativity, of solidarity, of humanity, realized and brought into being.

For scholars all over the world and in different eras, young, and not so young or old, it is with the legacy of its intellectuals, their ideas, their books, their discourse, within and outside the university, their reputation for intellectual confrontation, for the solidarity of scholarship, and the necessary denunciations too that it required, that scholars associate the name of Paris. Be it the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, Paul Ricoeur, Gertrude Stein,
Vladimir Nabokov, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett or, in more modern times, names such as that of Julia Kristeva – the list is long that has made so many curious, maybe envious, of the space of thought, performance and discourse that is the essence and legacy of Parisian intellectual life.

At moments of great change the role of Paris, its universities, its people, their discourse, and their engagement with the wider world makes it a most appropriate place then to make a reflection on the current changes taking place at global level and the implications for the European Union, the future of the European Union and how it might be perceived.

I would like to suggest, as a preliminary, that such writers from an earlier century as the anti-imperialist writers of the late eighteenth century, writers such as Denis Diderot are of relevance if we are to envision how such a European Union of citizens, as will contribute to the challenges presented by our increasing interdependence on our frail and fragile planet, might be brought into being.

That my reflection is being made in a year that has been designated European Year of the Citizen and during the seventh Irish Presidency of the European Union is also a consideration that I have to the forefront of my mind. Paris, with its legacy of assertion and vindication of the concept of the citizen, is a very appropriate setting for consideration of a Europe of citizens, a meaningful, shared citizenship at every level, a truly social Europe based on dignity, equality of respect, solidarity and human rights. It is with humility then, in full recognition of the scholarship of previous times, that I approach the delivery of my paper on the challenges facing the European Union.

I feel, now more than ever, at a time of economic crisis and loss of trust in institutions and decision-makers, that if Europe is to have a discourse informed with all the energy, concern and creativity that the times demand, then surely the lives, the conversations, the anguish, the hopes, the beliefs, and the commitment of those of previous centuries who believed, in their day, and in response to the circumstances of their times that not only was a world with the stamp of humanity necessary, but that it was possible, are relevant to us as examples of the moral courage we need in facing the contradictions of our times.

After all, Paris was one of the locations where the contradictions between morality and ethics on the one hand, and the crude extension of empire on the other, were so thoroughly contested, and over such a long period. While it is true that the holders of power were assisted by the majority of the leading intellectuals of the time with rationalizations that supported the assumptions or the belief systems of the day, I am very much aware of the valuable dissenting scholarship that confronted the project of empire itself – dissenting voices that found themselves frequently put outside the walls, silenced, or indeed, as in the case of some of the writers to whom I will refer, put into prison.
A recent and very welcome treatment of some of these leading dissenting voices from the heart of empire is that of Sankar Muthu. It was his work that brought most forcefully to my attention the contributions of the opponents of empire in the period of the European Enlightenment. Sankar Muthu’s seminal study *Enlightenment Against Empire* deals with the thought and writings against empire of Denis Diderot, Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder. In the case of Denis Diderot I was intrigued to read that it was while he was imprisoned for his views on religion, and on the occasion of his being visited by Rousseau that he was encouraged to take the risk of publishing his thoughts. We are so clearly reminded by such examples of the sacrifices made by intellectuals who had moral courage in the pursuit of *truth as they saw it*, and of the necessity of its communication to the public.

These dissident scholars, in addressing the accommodating illusions of their day, were aware that imperial conquest was being rationalized by notions of civilization, by the idea of progress, by an accommodating theology that even rejected ensoulment for those who were culturally different, by a racism that refused to recognize the dignity of others of different skin colour. The dissident writers saw the need to challenge those scholars who sought preferment from the wielders of power.

Professor Muthu has done a great service in claiming a rightful place for such dissidents as scholars of immense moral insight and courage. They were not perfect of course. Kant, for example, never adequately resiled from his early statements on race, but his recognition of the corrosive effect of the very concept of empire and its legacy, apart from the consequences of its delivery, which some were content to oppose, is of powerful moral significance.

That use of a counter-narrative raises issues for us today in the ethics of memory. We require a discourse in our times that allows us not only to make a new narrative for Europe urgent in itself, but also enables us to contest the distorting narratives of the past that have been accorded hegemony, and to challenge the accommodating amoral amnesia that offers an existence in the present without a troublesome past.

Twenty-five years ago, in January 1988, President Mitterrand stood in this very chamber and addressed an issue of singular importance in the ethics of memory: how the nation was to engage in the bicentenary celebrations the following year which recalled the French Revolution. In his speech, President Mitterrand tackled the fundamental question of how to reconcile the contrasting aspects of the Revolution and its memory, its goals and animating principles, with the violence that ensued in the following years. He argued for a consideration of the Revolution *en bloc*, taking all that happened in a single consideration and avoiding the temptation to separate out the laudable and virtuous from the violence and the upheaval.
Here at the Sorbonne that January and in a subsequent speech in June 1988, President Mitterand also argued that “a people without memory is no longer a free people” and observed what is universally true of the relationship between memory and freedom when he said that “dictators begin by wiping out the history of the facts that encumber them, by barring access to the past, and, believing themselves masters of the avenues to the future, muzzle any mutinous thoughts or words”.

The year of the bicentenary, 1989, was itself one of revolution. It was a year when ordinary people across Eastern Europe, including many who considered Voltaire and Diderot their own, reached back to the unfinished Enlightenment principles of liberty and equality to reclaim their own freedom. Indeed, President Mitterrand was himself able to witness it at first hand during a memorable meeting with Bulgarian dissidents shortly before the revolution.

We are at a moment now, in Europe and in our shared vulnerable planet, when we must again turn to critical thought if we are to be free to put our ethical stamp on our society, place our economics within a frame of ethical culture. We have to rework our past and present assumptions if we are to achieve a future with, for example, the achievement of intergenerational justice as a real prospect. We have to remember ethically if we are to understand the present with tolerance and imagine the alternatives of the future with courage.

I suggest that in facing these challenges we are assisted in recent times by philosophical work such as that on the ethics of memory, so brilliantly accomplished by the late Professor Paul Ricoeur, a graduate and former Chair of Philosophy at the Sorbonne, whose ideas have been applied by Irish philosopher Richard Kearney with great relevance to our Northern Ireland conflict. This work which speaks, for example, of steps towards an amnesty rather than an immoral amnesia in dealing with the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland and elsewhere has a rich application. In the context of the European Union the distinction between amnesia and amnesty has an underutilized value in the recasting and revising of some European nations’ history of their past relations with continents of the South, peoples and nations that bear the marks, and the experience, of what Pankaj Mishra has called, a legacy of “the Ruins of Empire”.

May I suggest incidentally, that, in relation to the matter of empire and its residue, even if an accommodating amnesia has revised history and rinsed the memory of empire from the minds of the descendants of some of the European power wielders, no such amnesia is experienced, or affected by, the descendants of those who have relatively recently emerged from the consequences of empire and who are conscious of their history.

Let me briefly refer to Paul Ricoeur’s work on the role of memory and the power of narrative as outlined in his *Time and Narrative* and *Memory, History,*
Forgetting. Narrative, Ricoeur observed, “provides us with a figure of something” that enables us, allows us to transcend the blind amnesia of the now. Narrative, as Richard Kearney tells us, enables us to resist the contemporary tendency to reduce history to a depthless present of what can be called “irreference”. Narrative – combining ethics and poetics – and narrative memory have the important function of creating empathy – a way of identifying with as many humans as possible and to participate in a common moral sense. Narrative thus is a foundation stone of the social and we are challenged to make a narrative for social Europe with an ethical memory and an imagination freed from failure, free to build an inclusive Europe.

This then is the task of memory. It is through narrating and re-narrating history, past, present and envisioned future, that we create through interaction a shared narratable world that would give us the capability of acting responsibly and empathetically in common, as Paul Ricoeur and Hannah Arendt might put it.

We are confronted in Europe with uniquely complex challenges. But whatever the myriad responses that we must generate, at its heart the essential response lies in striving towards an open, politically engaged but questioning, socially and culturally aware, citizenship – a citizenship that develops and protects the institutions that preserve the balance in society, that protect individual rights and fosters a sense of duty, responsibility, accountability, not the shallow deontological contractual duty of consequentialism, the narrow ethics discharged solely from obligation, but a duty founded on respect and understanding. The university as a space for critical scholarship is central to this ambition. They must not be ceded, in their critical capacity, to a distorting neo-functionalism in the service of our economic model in decline.

The moral issue of memory then cannot be avoided by Europeans. The facing of the realities of the past of empires is required both morally and practically, at the level of international relations, if we are to have global peace, if we are to have a new discourse for a new Europe, if we are to make a new narrative, if we are to achieve a forward movement towards universal human rights and if we are to achieve the fruits of building a transnational respect for the contribution of different cultures and belief systems, to what might become, and achieve acceptance, as universal human rights.

What is the Europe we seek then? How is it to be defined? How is it to remember itself? What does it wish to be – trading block or community? In global terms how is it to be engaged with by others? Imagined by others? How does it wish to be remembered in the future? These questions are often avoided or sidelined as accommodation is sought, for competing national interests, limited visions of narrow advantage, or at times under populist pressure are used as part of an attempt to invoke a politics of fear often delivered with a jingoistic rhetoric. As to intellectual work, what price, we might ask has been paid, and in our universities
too, for the rejection of normative theory, and its replacement by a deadly alliance of extreme individualism served by an irrational bureaucracy, and propagated as a substitute for the egalitarian ideal that envisaged a society of equals as its project.

Now, more than ever, we need open emancipatory scholarship that will give us a discourse that can accommodate a generous, humane version of Europe at home and in the global community. It is surely a mistake if we do not draw from the powerful intellectual tradition that is there within our different and differing European discourses.

Would it not be tragic if we allowed others, through our silence or neglect, to abuse seminal European works of scholarship, such as has already happened, for example, in the distortion of Adam Smith’s work by those who, ignoring his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, go on to misuse, by selective quotation, his *Wealth of Nations*, claiming it to be non-normative, a claim that cannot be sustained. Through silence we collude with the ransacking and the distortion of the serious scholarship of previous ages.

Scholarship is at its best when it is emancipatory, when it enables, assists, and confers freedom. We need that scholarship now as we together must work for, and envision a future for the European Union. Such new and emancipatory scholarship is already emerging at global level even if it is not on the ascendant in Europe.

Just as Diderot, Kant, Herder and others saw the flaw and consequence of empire at the heart of the European Enlightenment, many scholars around the world have seen the flaw and the consequences of a single hegemonic model of international economics, having been accepted, built on the mythical model of unregulated markets.

Such a model, be it in its Von Hayek or Friedman versions that argued for a limited state or, in its ordoliberalist version, demanded the use of the State to institute state arrangements for a de-peopled market economy, was presented as the only acceptable alternative to the social and economic democratically-based models of social economy that emerged after World War Two and that were offered, be it with success or failure in an accountable way by the elected representatives of the people.

Jürgen Habermas puts it succinctly when, seeking to address the challenge as to what we might do in the European Union if we are to save and develop in a truly humane way, a Europe he describes as “our fragile project”, he writes:

> My hope is that the neoliberal agenda will no longer be accepted at face value but will be open to challenge.

> The whole program of subordinating the life world to the imperatives of the market must be subjected to scrutiny… The agenda which recklessly prioritises shareholder interests and is indifferent to increasing
social inequality, to the emergence of an underclass, to child poverty, of a low wage sector, and so on has been discredited. With its mania for privatization, this agenda hollows out the core function of the state. It sells the remnants of a deliberative public sphere to profit maximizing financial investors, and it subordinates culture and education to the interests and moods of sponsors who are dependent on market cycles.

I believe that what Jürgen Habermas is responding to is more than just, as he would see it, a fragile project. It is a social crisis. It is the emergence and the acting out of what the great German social theorist of the nineteenth century Max Weber saw as that “bleak winter” that would replace “the promise of Spring” when a perversion of rationality became irrationality, as consciousness was numbed, when what was oppressive was unquestionable, and came to be suggested as inevitable, was received as natural.

The crisis to which the earlier work of Habermas pointed was a “legitimation crisis”. The signs of this rationality that has become irrationality are there today in our European Union as spectacle replaces discourse, as the length of communiqués shorten, as managing the media replaces open discussion, or amendment of shared or differing policy positions, as alternative political options that might have generated such a discourse as would be inviting to the citizens of Europe to participate, share, be creative, be responsive to global issues, be they issues of poverty, freedom, democracy or environmental intergenerational responsibility, are rejected, are relegated to the past, ignored or dismissed.

The European Union was founded with the memory of war fresh in the minds of the founders with all its loss of life, to drift into “unfreedom” as Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor put it is, I suggest, a greater loss, than the imposition of unfreedom through force of arms or a succeeding occupation. Indeed, as Montesquieu famously said: “The tyranny of a prince in an oligarchy is not so dangerous to the public welfare as the apathy of a citizen in a democracy.”

The consciousness of what it might be to be European – such a consciousness as is needed as vision, not simply as utopia, but as realizable project – is one that must be forged through an examination of previous historical relations, with such an openness to taking account of “the other”, in all its global complexity, as will enable such an amnesty on disabling narratives to be made, as will allow the present challenges at global level, be they those of freedom from hunger, a forward movement in universal human rights, the restructuring of economic theories of development, poverty, inequality or sustainability, to be addressed, and become the recognizable defining marks of our new Europe, not only safe from war, but inviting others through open and respectful discourse to recast the global community itself in an ethical, but diverse, way.
We need new and courageous scholarship, educational institutions that are committed to the sustenance and development of independent thought and democracy, an economic literacy that can carry the demands of ethics and the insights of philosophy, and a political economy for new times and new circumstances.

The challenges we now face are far more complex than those that prevailed, for example, at the time of the Cold War. Yet the intellectual energy seems so much less than that which prevailed in the decades which followed World War II.

Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* suggests that we, in intellectual terms, may have experienced a type of collapse into our post-modernist condition:

The deaths in the 1980s of Jean Paul Sartre, Roland Barthes, I. R. Stone, Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, C. L. R. James, mark the passing of an old order; they had been figures of learning and authority whose general scope over many fields gave them more than professional competence; that is, a critical intellectual style. The technocrats in contrast, as Lyotard says in *Postmodern Conditions* are principally competent to solve local problems, not to ask the big questions, given by the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment, and there are also the carefully accredited policy experts, who serve the security mongers who have guided international affairs.

This passage expresses much more than a melancholy for the rich decades of European intellectual work. It identifies the distance that has opened up between a privileged technocratic thinking in Europe that has, in so many respects, the character of the irrationally bureaucratic that Max Weber forecast, a continent that has tended to dismiss history, ignore its own rich and diverse intellectual legacy, and remain blind to, or to ignore other continents where new thinking of a wider diverse world exists. A new world that has moved on from the old order, and that is seeking to be seen, to bring new models into existence – models that are very different from those that rely on the surviving vestiges of empire and obviously very different too to the work of those scholars who fetishised the power of the centralized state at the cost of personal freedom. Cold War choices are no longer the choices being considered by the many countries previously forced, or induced, to see them as sole choices.

In the wider world, change, welcome change in some places, threatening change in others that irrationally invokes old fundamentalist distortions, is underway. In the final Chapter of his *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said summarised the changes he saw as underway even at the beginning of the Nineties:
The old invented histories and traditions and efforts to rule are giving way to newer, more elastic and relaxed theories of what is so discrepant and intense in the contemporary moment. In the West, post-modernism has seized upon the historical weightlessness, consumerism, and spectacle of the new order. To it are affiliated other ideas like post-Marxism and post-structuralism, varieties of what the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo describes as “the weak thought” of “the end of modernity”. Yet in the Arab and Islamic world many artists and intellectuals are still concerned with modernity itself, still far from exhausted. This is similarly the case in the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Indian subcontinent; these movements intersect culturally in a fascinating cosmopolitan space animated by internationally prominent writers like Salman Rushdie, Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera, who intervene forcefully not only as novelists but also as commentators and essayists. And their debate over what is modern or post-modern is joined by the anxious, urgent question of how we are to modernize, given the cataclysmic upheavals the world is experiencing as it moves into the fin de siècle, that is, how we are going to keep up life itself when the quotidian demands of the present threaten to outstrip the human presence?…

When I first read that summary I was moved by the poignancy, the urgency, of such a statement. Today I see it as a rallying call, in times of uncertainty for the defence of the public world, for public intellectuals and scholarship to re-engage.

How then might Europe present itself to this new circumstance? We must recognize that our problems are global. I believe that a shared discourse, such as will sufficiently acknowledge the interdependent global nature of our lives together, their complexity, as will accept the moral urgency of resolving conflicts, facing problems that are planetary, and that have intergenerational consequences, must be brought into existence.

It must be a discourse that will include citizens from diverse settings, beliefs, and cultures. It is an opportune time now, perhaps, as we search for sources to give the insights of not just the exilic, but the migratory experience, their appropriate place as informing sources of theoretical insights. For uninhibited as it is by the burden of possessions, or by the authoritarianism of a respectability based on the sedentary and its unquestioned repressions, dominations or exclusions, the migratory experience has forged a morality out of the experience of transience whose humanity and whose richness we have neglected in the social sciences.

In a European Union where unemployment is our greatest problem and where youth unemployment is its most challenging feature, if we are to accept the need for intergenerational justice, we require an inclusive discourse, but it requires as a
mere beginning, a realization, an acceptance that our global problems, in an ever more interdependent world, are neither amenable to any type of previous tested and failed technocratic response, nor are our challenges merely economic. They are social, political and cultural. Our existence, we must remind ourselves, is as social beings, not as commodified consumers without a history, incapable of envisioning an alternative future.

Once more I turn to Paul Ricoeur and recall what he envisaged as the necessary steps towards a generous theory and delivery of citizenship. His developed Aristotelian view is that action be aimed at the good, be sought to attain a good life with, and for, others in just institutions. If we are to attain that good life, we must work towards institutions that correspond to our sense of justice, in the obligations that they impose upon us, and the privileges and opportunities that they afford us. As Ricoeur put it: “It is as citizens that we become human. The wish to live within just institutions signifies nothing else.” The task for politics is to establish what justice calls for, and to build the institutions that make justice effective. Power, held in common, must prevail over domination.

There is an abiding truth in Ricoeur’s observation that “the wish to live in just institutions arises from the same level of morality as does the desire for personal fulfilment and the reciprocity of friendship”. But crucially, this desire to live well is not confined to living well with friends, it includes a desire to live well with others, with “distant others” as Ricoeur put it. The desire to live well and with others animates the “life of institutions”. This is a vision of human living in a world that is a shared social existence of exchanged narratives of being not reducible to homo-economicus. This is not an invitation to abstraction. I agree with the late Richard Rorty’s view that it is from our own circumstances and our own frailties that we must make our transformation.

It is political institutions I believe that must define the space and accountable character of such other institutions as we need for a functioning state or economy. To live as conscious citizens means, as Raymond Williams might have put it, our becoming the arrow of our existence rather than the commodified target of the market and its agents.

It is the task of democratic politics to ensure institutions are transparent and accountable. It is the task of politics to state its programme for the tasks of justice. It is upon that basis that politics seeks legitimacy and consent. It risks losing its legitimacy among citizens if it seeks to divert responsibility from the sphere of the accountable elective, to an unaccountable technocracy or the mysterious marketplace. The task of developing a consciousness of engaged, concerned and responsible citizenship requires, in the member states of the European Union, for example, an educational system that allows space for a critical awareness, allows democracy to educate and in turn democratises education.
Where are the ideas and the discourse we need to come from if not from the educational institutions and the open and free debate of public intellectuals? What are the prospects for that debate? How is it to happen in conditions of an ever more monopolized commodified media, at a time of decline and fall of public service broadcasting in so many countries. It would be easy to sink into an Adornoesque pessimism in the consideration of such questions. But we must make the space, as others have done before us, and begin with confidence, and joy too, to craft our discourse. It is a time for public intellectuals to have moral courage, to break the silence, to reject false inevitabilities.

In our times, the connection in Europe between democratic discourse and emancipatory scholarship is dissolving rather than strengthening. However, we must take heart from the fact that already, in some other parts of the world, in other continents, it is that connecting discourse which is producing a diversity of models for future living. Let us take their example, accept their innovative thought and engage with it as Irish migrant scholars did all those centuries ago at the Sorbonne and all over Europe.

Our universities must seek out new opportunities, new means of engaging with citizens about the possibilities of the long future of our lives together. Universities and public intellectuals must defend and privilege what is emancipatory, must break away from the quietude of that “unfreedom” to which we have drifted, as Charles Taylor put it in his description of the contemporary anxiety for “authenticity”.

Scholarship is emancipatory when it confers intellectual, social, cultural, moral and economic freedoms, to live, develop, anticipate, and imagine the possibilities known, and unknown, of a life shared and lived to its fullest with sustainability and responsibility. We may, after all have to consume to live but it is not our destiny to live to consume.

In conclusion then let me salute again the rich intellectual legacy of Paris, the Sorbonne and the French people. Let me salute again, along with the contemporary Professor Sankar Muthu, the extraordinary courage of those earlier scholars such as Diderot, Rousseau, Kant and Herder who, in their time, confronted the populist accommodations to empire at the heart of the European Enlightenment, took all the risks, and made their critique which would go on to help others.

And let us never forget that in making their commitment, from their space, in their time, they opened the space for others in distant places. C. L. R. James pointed to the space opened by Abbé Raynal, the other Encyclopaedists, and the Revolution itself, for such revolutionaries as Toussaint L’Ouverture who was leading the struggle for the rights of his fellow Haitians. As James puts it:

in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau and Raynal, of Mirabeau,
Robespierre and Danton. And in one respect he excelled them all. For even these masters of the spoken and written word, owing to the class complications of their society, too often had to pause, to hesitate, to qualify. Toussaint could defend the freedom of the blacks without reservation, and this gave to his declaration a strength and a single-mindedness rare in the great documents of the time.

The French bourgeoisie could not understand that elevated as was his tone Toussaint had written neither bombast nor rhetoric but the simple and sober truth.

We need public intellectuals now more than ever, who will assist us in seeking a necessary, simple, generous and emancipatory truth and strategy that add, not takes, from the flux of our fragile democracy.

The time of strong normative theory, democratic and inclusive, is called for, and must come again as a response to our present circumstances, and if it were not to be, can the future of Europe be appropriately envisaged within a doctrine of interests? I suggest that it cannot and further that even if it were so, the disabling consequences would not be confined to Europe but would be global. Language itself must be recovered in its emancipatory potential. We must speak for our unrealized potential and humanity, address our realizable possibilities rather than drearily serve in quietude as a blunt tool of discordant interests. That too was the conclusion and the suggestion of a great European, Vaclav Havel, as recorded in his diary following a visit to the institutions of the European Union some years ago.

What is this world that would bear the stamp of humanity? When Noam Chomsky gave the Bertrand Russell Memorial Lecture at Cambridge in 1971, he quoted Bertrand Russell’s “version of the world that we must seek” which was

a world in which the creative spirit is alive, in which life is an adventure full of joy and hope, based rather upon the impulse to construct than upon the desire to retain what we possess or to seize what is possessed by others. It must be a world in which affection has free play, in which love is purged of the instinct for domination, in which cruelty and envy have been dispelled by happiness and the unfettered development of all the instincts that build up life and fill it with mental delights.

Such a vision not only still has relevance; it can have the force of inspiration. Let us have then a European project in this year of the European citizen that aims for an authenticity of the life and language for all of our people and their institutions. May we move beyond a Europe of the arid spectacle, beyond the dead language, towards participation, using our words, and our reflection in a way that will give the required ring of humanity to our lives. Onwards to a Europe of the citizens.