



Speech by President Alain Terrenoire

General Assembly, Strasbourg, 14 February 2025

Dear Pan-European friends!

I have good news to share with you: Paneurope exists.

It is in Strasbourg, at the European Parliament.

Paneurope is more than one hundred years old. It remains young.

Paneurope is you, and it is primarily to you, young Pan-Europeans, that I am addressing myself.

While not entirely fulfilled, the centennial wish of Coudenhove Kalergi has largely been realised. It is his work and that of all those who, with him and after him, gathered Europe, fragmented by wars and torn apart by destructive rivalries, into the Union.

It is also the work of his successor, Otto von Habsburg-Lorraine, who continued the same path that led to the enlargement of the Union to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Just over twenty years ago, in the fall of 2004, I was in Paris in my office at Paneurope France when Téa Katukia, our General Delegate, informed me that the Archduke was calling me from Pöcking, his residence near Munich.

I remember every word of our conversation.

„Dear Alain Terrenoire,” he said, „I am going to ask you for a great favour. I will not run for re-election during the next General Assembly in Strasbourg, and I would like you to accept succeeding me as President of the International Pan-European Union.”

After a moment of hesitation, I replied, „Your Excellency, I cannot claim to succeed you”. However, as he insisted kindly, I ultimately accepted the honour and responsibility of this mission.

Since then, I have strived to fulfil both the mission entrusted to me by Coudenhove-Kalergi’s successor and the trust placed in me by the Pan-Europeans. Trust, which they have generously renewed three times.

Except on rare occasions when I was prevented, I have travelled throughout Europe at the invitation of our member organisations. Some of them are particularly active and passionately keep the Pan-European project alive. I will not name them; they will recognise themselves. I

am especially grateful to them. Others, for various reasons, including financial ones, have met less frequently, but have kept the flame of our shared convictions alive.

However, there are still too many countries without a member organisation of the Pan-European Union. Reviving those that have fallen dormant and creating new member organisations must be a priority for the next five years. I know from experience that this is not easy. Pan-European engagement is voluntary, but it requires financial means to carry out.

Before passing the baton to the next president that you will elect, I want to express my deep and sincere gratitude. Thanks to the warm welcome you have always given me wherever I have been received and through our many exchanges, I have become a true Pan-European.

Certainly, since my childhood, with my family and in my political life, I have always been a convinced European. My parents met through their loyalty to the Pan-European commitment of Aristide Briand. Together, they mobilised against Salazarism, Francoism, fascism, and Nazism, which spread racism, anti-Semitism, and totalitarian nationalism across Europe. Together, they resisted. Together, they overcame the suffering of war. And for both of them, it was particularly harsh.

Then, together, they resumed the path of reconciliation and united Europe. By following this same path, I became a French Pan-European.

Then, by interacting with you, by immersing myself in the cultural, historical, linguistic, and geographical diversity of Europe, expanded with the richness of its diversity, I became a French Pan-European.

I was accompanied in this semantic and psychological transformation by my wife Edith, born in Silesia and a refugee, with her family, in Lower Saxony. Her own culture, with the personal sacrifices she had to accept, were foundational to our couple and our family, which was enriched by our Hungarian daughter-in-law, our Bulgarian son-in-law, and their children, of mixed heritage.

After the collapse of the USSR and the end of the wars in former Yugoslavia, Europe was deluded. It imagined that liberal democracy had definitively prevailed, bringing peace to the old continent. A quarter of a century later, Europe, whose union remains unfinished, faces a series of threats that we must overcome.

This moment is serious and dangerous, the worst Europe has faced since the end of World War II. The culture, civilization, and spiritualities that founded Europe, with the values derived from them, could collapse during the 21st century.

Let us be lucid and realistic. Let us consider Europe as it is today, with its obvious strengths and ongoing changes.

In all European countries, national-populism is on the rise. It spreads like wildfire. Some of its supporters are already in power. Others are preparing to do so. Last weekend, the leaders of the new political group in the European Parliament, „Patriots for Europe“, gathered in Madrid. Watching these far-right European leaders refer to Donald Trump’s programme, to the methods of Argentina’s President Javier Milei, and call for negotiations with Putin, I felt a deep unease. The spectacle of this gathering reminded me of the 1930s and the subsequent tragedies.

As always in history, national-populism feeds on social demagoguery, xenophobia, and even racism. While this new nationalism often finds its roots, in Eastern Europe, in the remnants of pro-Soviet communism, it mainly stems, in the West, from the rejection of uncontrolled immigration.

Yet, I find it difficult to understand how the dictatorial and imperialistic power of Putin, a revanchist of the former USSR, can seduce Europeans who benefit from democratic freedoms and the progress they have fostered.

Equally, I am puzzled to see European nationalists fascinated by „Make America Great Again,” which will certainly not translate into „Make Europe Great Again.” On the contrary, as the American President warned us, this electoral slogan, which he wasted no time in implementing, means, for him and for Elon Musk, his enforcer, a weakened, docile, divided Europe, subjected to American technology and weaponry.

Yet, Europe, with its 450 million consumers, its researchers, its industrial capabilities, can, if it has the political will, with data centres, giant computers, a unified capital market, and its popular savings, put its creative genius to work for Artificial Intelligence, the new industrial revolution.

It also depends on a determined European political will to increase military budgets and prioritise them for a European defence industry, increasingly independent. Capable of such a great leap, Europe could also, with the Ukrainians, militarily push back Russia and its North Korean mercenaries within the borders it should never have crossed. Let us not allow a so-called „peace” negotiation to take place against the legitimate interests of Ukraine and its territorial integrity.

I warn the European Union, if it begins to accept the undermining of its internationally recognised borders and those of its neighbours, it will encourage Russia to continue this sinister reconquest. After Ukraine, Georgia, already subjected to an illegitimate power, is at risk of being recolonised. Moldova, the Baltic States, in turn, could face the imposition of Belarusian-style political regimes. Let us be clear, Pan-Europeans will never accept that these countries or any European country, be it in whole or in part, fall under the domination of Russia.

This revival must take place in all areas where the power of a free, democratic, and independent Europe must be exercised. It is up to us, Pan-Europeans, to show the way. Richard Coudenhove Kalergi and Otto von Habsburg succeeded in influencing the political, economic, and intellectual leaders of Europe. It is up to us to continue their example.

To open a new chapter in this history, I asked the Council of Presidency, which met in Split in October 2024, to pronounce on the candidacy of Professor Pavo Barišić to succeed me as president of the International Pan-European Union. This proposal was adopted almost unanimously.

I have known Pavo Barišić for several years. A professor at the university, he held high political responsibilities as Minister of Science and Education. He presides over the Pan-European Union of Croatia with the friendly trust of Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković. It was his rare qualities and experience that led me to entrust him with the General

Secretariat of our international organisation. He carried out this delicate mission with rigor and competence, to the satisfaction of Pan-Europeans.

Furthermore, I thought that a Croatian president at the head of the oldest pro-European organisation would be very well received throughout the European Union, especially in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have joined it or wish to join.

That is why I ask you to adopt my proposal and vote for the election of Pavo Barišić as President of the International Pan-European Union.

Alain Terrenoire

President of the International Pan-European Union