
German President Addresses Carolinum on European Matters

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A crowded room of academics, senators, rectors and guests welcomed his Excellency Joachim Gauck, President of the Federal Republic of Germany for a speech on European Diversity and Wealth in relation with the Czech Republic. Invited rectors and vice-rectors from distinguished Czech and Slovakian universities filled the front rows. Additional guests were present, such as Miroslava Němcová, Karel Schwarzenberg as well as President of Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman.

Conducted in German and Czech language, guests were supplied with translation headsets for greater participation and mutual understanding, thanks to an informed team of interpreters. After a lavish welcoming procession accompanied by a traditional organ accompaniment, the speakers entered the Great Hall and were welcomed by the vice-rector Jan Royt. As a leading expert of Art History, Professor Royt welcomed all distinguished guests and spectators, with a short explanation of the history of the overhanging tapestry in view above the speakers. The Rector of Charles University, Professor Tomáš Zima then offered a brief history of Czech European unity and democracy, as well as complimenting the German president as a “patriot” of both Europe and Germany and an advocate of morality and modernity, the key to tranquillity Czech-German relations. Gauck was offered an honourable award on behalf of the University, in form of a gold medal, for his promotion of democracy, freedom and human rights – accepted with a wide smile, a firm handshake and a round of rousing applause followed.

Following this, Gauck took the centre stage, and expressed his delight to once again be at Charles University, Prague. Admiring the natural beauty of the city surroundings, he stated that springtime in Prague is and always has been beautiful, reminiscing over his visit just after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Comparing Prague at that point to the German Democratic Republic, he said that the beauty of the city has been restored wonderfully since, complimenting the picturesque and historical setting that is Prague. With twenty-five years since freedom, we must appreciate “something that cannot be taken for granted” a statement of gratitude and consciousness.

Gauck then specified that Charles University hold the founding principles for the progression and embodiment of Europe. In view, the backdrop displayed the flags of both Czech and European Union flags, testament to his statement of this embodiment at Charles University. He explained further that historically, Charles University has held this European character, teaching nationals of Bohemian, Silesia, Bavaria and Saxony in its early years – in Latin language for the sake of widespread understanding of knowledge. This however was paused during the years of Nazism, in which the Czech part of Charles University closed its doors for several years, however establishing afterwards the European identity. Compliments were then given to a Czech Patriot, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the first Democratic President of Czechoslovakia and a teacher at Charles University before this period, lauded for his beliefs and trust in European unity despite setbacks.

Gauck said then that “Charles University also stands for Prague itself”, to address the balance of both European and localised identity. Its mixed architecture uniquely reflects the diversity of faiths, languages and nationalities, now unified as a symbol of a diverse centre of Europe. It was a shame, however, that the Jewish spirit was removed from this melting pot of cultures, with the legacy of Franz Kafka as marvellous reminder and representative of Czech-Jewish culture.

President Gauck then stated his optimism of seeing younger generation tackling the past with such valour, acceptance and revisionism, with Sudeten German and Czech relations being slowly rekindled. To “find the courage to rebuild together and form rapprochement”, through education, shared traditions and language diversity, he said was the key to this developing tranquillity. If Kafka experienced the unity, which we hold today, he would have felt inscrutable admiration for the future generations of his country as a modern democracy.

Following an inspiring ovation of gratitude, Gauck’s Czech counterpart Miloš Zeman made his response. He stated that he also agreed, that the basic European cultural value is diversity – different to a melting pot, but more as an embodiment combination of mixed nationalities but a single European assimilation. He said that this symbolises the fascinating requirement of diversity to form a single identity. He then quoted one of the world’s great statesmen, General Charles de Gaulle that “France is country of 300 cheeses” and that Europe holds a similar but even greater aspect of diversity, as well as complimenting the historical leader and the French passion for cheese. Thoroughly engaging events left the privileged audience satisfied with the unity of the present, and projections for the future of European collaboration.



Sam Pepper is interested in meeting and discussing culture between people from other nationalities. This, he says is one of his favourite hobbies, which led him to great personal development during his Erasmus study period in Prague. He also offers simple English lessons to other European students to gain understanding of other cultures and help others improve with their language skills.

By initially learning meeting people of other European cultures at his home University at Essex, whilst living with French, Swedish and Norwegian people, he says that he has become fascinated in European attitudes, comparing similarities and differences in European politics, popular culture and ways of life. He has always taken a firm interest in current affairs and hot topics in world politics, therefore relished the opportunity to write about subjects such as disparity in East Asia, European Union immigration and a European multinational MA programme. These opportunities have not only developed his interest in international affairs, but also it has shown him the value of being a European student in the Czech Republic.