

Introductory remarks by

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*at the second meeting of the Group on the Spiritual and
Cultural Dimension of Europe on*

“The conditions of European solidarity”

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- Once more may I thank you for your commitment to the work of the Group. And let me extend a warm welcome to our guests today and thank them for attending.
- Today our subject is **Europe and solidarity**. Solidarity is a word with many layers of meaning and of feeling. It goes further than fraternity and not just because it is gender-neutral.
- I am convinced that solidarity is a key feature of a distinctive European *ethos*. And I am certain this will be even truer in the enlarged Union. After all, for many of us, the word itself is inextricably linked with the movement that did so much to bring about the end of Europe's division.
- Solidarity is essential if the European project is to develop clearly and firmly in a humanistic direction. In the enlarged Union, we must step up our efforts to avoid projecting an image of Europe that is no more than complex procedures and difficult negotiations between conflicting interests.

- The new objectives we are pursuing demand that we clearly affirm the primacy of human dignity. And that means asserting the invaluable importance of solidarity.
- To go back to what the Group said at its first meeting, I want to point out that the concept of solidarity the new Union must rely on should be dynamic, not static. And that our goal must be to build up a genuine political solidarity a solidarity that goes far beyond any narrow economic definition.
- We must propound a stronger **social solidarity** towards the less-favoured groups in our society. And we must also support an **international solidarity** assuming our full responsibility towards the rest of the world and, in particular, the countries of the South. Solidarity is the answer to the growing gaps within our societies and throughout the world.
- In my view, such a concept of solidarity must be an essential feature of the long-awaited **European foreign policy** (the last Eurobarometer survey on the demand for a European foreign policy shows this). It could also be a way of identifying a clear European path to a new world governance.
- As a supranational democracy, the Union has kept a delicate balance to date between the Member States, both large and small. The Convention needs to pay attention to this aspect.
- **Can we unite half a billion Europeans around a concept of political solidarity?** Can we galvanise millions of Europeans by an idea that has political implications as well as economic and social ones in areas ranging from the European social model to solidarity in the face of an external threat? If the answer is “yes”, then how can we do this? And how can we adapt this idea to different national contexts and perceptions?

- After the negotiations on the Union's institutional framework within the Convention and the Intergovernmental Conference to follow, it will be very important to clarify the key values on which the new institutional architecture is based. Solidarity must be one of the foundations on which tomorrow's European Union is built.